

# JUNE'S QUEST



FLORENCE KERIGAN





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JUNE'S QUEST  
HER ADVENTURES ON THE HIGHWAY









“YOU DON’T KNOW HOW MUCH HOME CAN MEAN TO A GIRL  
WHO HASN’T ANY.—*Page 33.*”



# JUNE'S QUEST

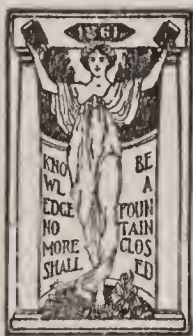
*Her Adventures on the Highway*

BY

FLORENCE KERIGAN

ILLUSTRATED BY

R. HOWELL RANSLEY



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JUNE'S QUEST

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## A SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD

Oh, who will hit the highway,  
The weedy, dusty, highway,  
The sunny, gusty, highway,  
The highway with me?

The road is twisting, lithe and brown,  
And wears a gray-gold shawl,  
With patterns where the sun shines down  
And leafy shadows fall.

The road's a winding ribbon, flung,  
A clue to pirate gold,  
The moon a silver lantern hung —  
The signal, as of old!

And romance rides the shady way,  
Before the sun is hot;  
Fair fingers gather boughs of May;  
Knights ride to Camelot.

And some roads take you far away,  
To Timbuctoo, or Rome,  
Hong Kong, Bangkok, Mandalay!  
And — some lead you to Home!

So, who will hit the highway,  
The weedy, dusty, highway,  
The sunny, gusty, highway,  
The highway, with me?



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# JUNE'S QUEST

## CHAPTER I

### JUNE

June Severne came into her room and flung bundles right and left. Two she laid carefully on her study table, but the others she allowed to remain where they fell. They were intriguing bundles: a flat box such as suits and dresses come in, two or three flat envelopes with flaps thrust through rings to make carrying handles, and a big square box such as is used for nothing but hats.

The two precious ones were smaller. One held flowers, wrapped in oiled paper through which hints of green and pink showed; the other was flat and oblong and rather heavy for its size. It might have contained gloves, but one had a suspicion that if such had been the case, it, too, would have joined the hatbox and other parcels on the floor.

She took off her hat, with a quick turn of her wrist, ran her fingers through her wavy, bobbed hair, and relaxed in her deep armchair for just a moment. Then she sprang to her feet and disappeared into her bathroom, reappearing in a moment with a bowl which she set on the study table.

She opened the oiled-paper wrappings and separated the roses, and began to set them into the bowl, carefully and slowly, and, somehow, lovingly.

“What did you get?”

“Let's see it!”

“We saw you coming across the campus with lots and lots of bundles!”

In a moment June's room was filled with chattering girls. There were really only four of them, including herself, but they gave the impression of being a whole convention. June looked up as they all burst in, and cocked an eyebrow, quizzically, but her slim, white hands continued to hover gracefully like butterflies over the roses — blush-pink roses in a powder-blue bowl.

“Did some one give you those, June?” asked Cathie Costello, the fair one with the impudent,

tip-tilted, Irish nose which scented a romance long before one appeared.

“No, dearest,” lilted June, and paused to bite the end off a refractory stem.

“You’ll hurt your teeth,” said Diana Mallory, from the depths of the armchair.

June spat out the chewed green wood neatly into her waste-basket. The girls applauded.

June’s amber eyes twinkled. “I’ve inherited the straight-spitting talent from a whole line of tobacco-chewing ancestors,” she told them unsmilingly. “It’s wonderful what heredity will do!”

The girls howled. They recognized the imitation of Joyce Stetson, who boasted about her ancestors and their accomplishments. Joyce was not much of a favorite, either.

“I bought them from a man on the curb,” went on June. “And they *could* be fresher.”

“That’s what it means to have plenty of money,” sighed Mary Cole, “as well as aesthetic tastes.”

“You’d rather have roses than caramels, too, wouldn’t you?” suggested Cathie, wistfully.

June chuckled. “If I couldn’t have both, I would. There. How does it look? I won-

der — ” she touched a petal softly with a pointed finger. “ I do hope — Di, dear, have you an aspirin? ”

Di fumbled in her pocket. “ I always carry them with me,” she said, in her saddest voice, “ for I never know when one of those terrible nervous headaches will hit me. It is simply agony to be a victim of nerves like mine. I *do* hope you haven't a headache from shopping so long and so hard, June.”

She finally brought out a couple of crumpled handkerchiefs, and one clean, folded one, and located the thin box in one of the folds. She took out a chalky white tablet and handed it to June with an expression of profound sympathy on her face.

“ Not at all,” said June, matter-of-factly, and crumbled the tablet between her fingers, then dropped it into the blue bowl. Di looked slightly horrified, shut the tin box with a sharp snap, and put it and the handkerchiefs back into her bulging pocket.

“ Now, they'll be all right,” said June, cheerfully. “ You *are* a comfort to have around, Di. One never lacks for a pocket-hanky when one sneezes, nor a stamp, nor loose change to



give the tea-room waitress or the car conductor. You are prepared for every emergency as soon as it emerges, aren't you, old dear? "

" I try to be," said Di, primly. " One never knows."

June swept the papers and bits of stem and broken leaf sprays into her basket, then she took the bowl and set it on top of her bookcase.

The girls watched her, silently. June had a way of creating beautiful effects.

" Did you say caramels? " she asked, laughing back over her shoulder. She produced a silver candy-basket from somewhere and passed it to Di. " Have some."

" I mustn't eat caramels. They're bad for my stomach. And they make my teeth ache. May I have two? "

" Help yourself, and pass it around. My hands are filthy from the rose stems." She gathered up the strewn parcels and took them into the bathroom with her. " I shall emerge anon in all my new glory — how does the poet say it ' Like a ghost from the tomb ' — horrors! Like a butterfly from its cocoon! "

She shut the door behind her.

Cathie and Mary Cole came and perched on

the arms of Di's chair and dipped into the candy-basket. June always had plenty and dispensed it lavishly.

For a while they chewed blissfully. Then Cathie's eye rested upon the photograph of an exceedingly pleasant-looking man.

"June looks like her father, doesn't she?"

"M — hm," assented Mary. "Especially since she's had her hair cut real short. It waves back just as his does. She has the same trick of pushing it back with her wrist, too."

Cathie sighed, and Mary laughed.

"He's stunning," drawled Di. "I don't blame our impressionable little Hibernian friend for having the grand pash. I could fall for him myself."

"You missed it, Di," went on Mary, just as though she had not told Di the same tale a dozen times over. "You should have come with us to hear his concert. We had more fun! It was thrilling to walk into that box just as if we owned it. When I go to the theatre on my own money I usually go in the peanut. Sometimes if the boy-friend is flush we go in the orchestra. But a box — ! June's father sent the tickets to her, and told her to bring her friends around

to see him afterward. I was scared to death, weren't you, Cath? But he was awfully nice. No wonder she'd rather go off gypsying with him than dance herself to death at some summer resort!"

"Why didn't you come with us, Di?" asked Cathie. "Oh, you had another engagement, didn't you?"

"Yes. The family were coming to Westbury to hear Madame Sergieff, so I had to go and spend the day and night with them at the hotel. Mums would never have forgiven me, if I hadn't. She thinks one's first duty is to one's family."

"Oh, yes. I remember. Was she good?"

"Oh, yes. Stunning-looking. Black eyebrows and snow-white hair. I thought it was a wig, but the press notices say she is a Russian refugee and might even be the Grand Duchess, *incog.*, and that her hair turned white in a single night. But she is real young. And sing! — But she didn't take us home in a taxi afterwards, nor introduce us to a friend, nor ask us into her dressing-room. We just walked out like every one else."

"I'm just crazy about June's father,"

sighed Cathie. "I won't ever marry a man who doesn't look exactly like him! You wouldn't think he was over thirty to look at him."

"He's forty," said Mary. "June told me."

"He doesn't look it," objected Cathie. "He has hardly any gray hair, and he's quite active."

"He would be, at forty," hooted Mary, derisively.

"Forty's old, of course, but not awfully old. I mean, not old enough to have to go around in a wheel-chair!"

"Of course not. He acted just like a boy," went on Cathie, raptly. "He took us to a quiet little Italian place for supper afterward. June wanted to try a place near the theatre, where a lot of people were going. We could hear the music, and they advertised a special attraction, but Mr. Severne said he guessed we had had enough music, and that he had discovered this little Italian place which reminded him of Venice. It was quaint inside. There weren't many people there. The waiters were in costume, and there were Italian flower girls going up and down the aisles selling cigarettes



and flowers. He bought us each a bunch of violets. Remember, Mary? And he told us about Venice and Naples, and the waiter heard him and smiled and said something to him in Italian, and he answered him." She sighed deeply. "I have some of the violets pressed now, Mary."

"So have I," nodded Mary.

"And then he took us home in a taxi," went on Cathie, "all the way to the door of the school so that Mrs. Milligan would know we were safe and sober —"

"Cathie!"

"Well, she seemed to think we wouldn't be! She wasn't going to let us go at first."

"Joyce says the place we wanted to go into is a famous night club. She's been there often," added Mary.

"She would!" sniffed Di.

"And you know what Joyce said — or hinted —" said Mary.

"Yes," flared Cathie, "and I think it's a shame! I don't know whether June heard or not, but I certainly did land all over Joyce. I haven't liked to ask June if she heard —"

"Of course not, Cathie!"



"But I guess she didn't. She's been just as sweet to her — June has to Joyce, I mean."

"Well, that's June. Every one isn't a little spitfire like you, Cathie!"

"I fancied that evening that she looked as if she had been crying, and she looked worried for a while. But whether she heard it or not, Joyce had no right to say it. She doesn't know! No one knows! It would be bad enough to say if it were true, but just to suspect it and tell it — Oh, well. We can't all be like June, but thank goodness we don't have to be like Joyce, either!"

"Sh!" hissed Di. "Here she comes."

The door opened, and for a moment the girls stared, then they gave little squeals of delight.

"You adorable thing! Come here and let me look at you!"

June laughed at them and came into the room, turning around like a model in a store. She was wearing knickers of heavy brown corduroy, a dark-brown sweater, a tan silk shirt with a mannish brown silk tie, brown stockings and comfortable old brown oxfords, and a brown felt hat of no particular style which she wore tilted at a rakish angle.

“You look all set for romance!” cried Cathie. Then, as the others laughed: “But, doesn’t she? She looks like François Villon in the *Vagabond King!*”

Di squeezed her affectionately. “Incurably romantic, isn’t she, June? But you do look like a prince in disguise.”

June laughed. “I’m glad you like them, girls. I’ve bought two more shirts like these, and also a leather rain-coat for rainy days, and an extra pair of boots. So I think I’ll do. Of course the main thing is comfort, but I don’t object to looking like a prince in disguise — sure you don’t mean a princess, Di? And Cathie’s allusion to François Villon was rather a left-handed, extremely Celtic, compliment. Did you mean before or after, Cathie, dear? As I remember that gorgeous matinee, François was ragged and terribly in need of a shave. Were you suggesting — ?”

“Oh, no!” gasped Cathie, and then she laughed as she saw the twinkle in June’s eyes. “Oh, June, if I ever come across a man with eyes and a dashing air like yours, this child will be a gone coon! Why weren’t you a boy, June?”

"Because then I couldn't be a schoolmate of yours, Cathie!"

"You look so trim and adventurous," sighed Mary. "I'd give anything if I could do something like that. I'm sick of the summer resorts or nice safe camps!"

"You and I, both," said Di, emphatically. "But the family insists that I must go along!"

June smiled rather wistfully. "It's fun. You never know what's going to happen next, especially since we bought Maryannelizabeth." She picked up the flat package which still lay wrapped upon the table. "I've got something else to show you." She threw her hat into a chair, and sat on the edge of the table, swinging one foot, while she untied the cord and unwrapped the white paper.

Inside was a silhouette — a tall, graceful, slender woman, standing by a window, with a suspicion of vines about it. The figure was black on white, and framed in a flat black frame picked out with gold.

"Isn't that lovely?" breathed Cathie.

"It's adorable," said Mary.

"Sweet," murmured Di.

And in the eyes of each was a question.

June saw the question, and she looked at the silhouette for a time in silence. She rose, deliberately, and set it beside the photograph of her father. Then she sat down on the table again, and her slender fingers played nervously with the string.

“ I suppose you know,” she began, “ that I can’t remember much about my mother. I was only two years old when — it — happened. But I do remember seeing her standing by my window just like that. There were vines around it — something sweet-smelling especially at night, and a moon. And she stood there like that — looking out. I’d give anything if I could remember her face.”

“ And you don’t remember anything else about her? ” asked Cathie, her eyes as big as saucers.

“ Nothing at all. So when I saw that silhouette, I just had to have it. It means Mother to me — far more than that photo means Dad. Just the way Dad’s violin would mean *him* if anything happened. And so — ” she sighed a little, and Cathie’s eyes filled with sudden tears.

“ What do you suppose happened to her? ”



asked Cathie, and Di promptly pinched her.

“ I don't know, Cathie. Dad never speaks of her.”

A far-away tinkle warned that in half an hour dinner would be served in the big dining-room downstairs. Cathie and Mary and Diana sprang to their feet as if worked by the same string, and made for the door.

“ See you later,” called Mary, as the door closed after them.

For a moment June sat there, swinging her restless foot. Then she went to the bookcase, and, resting her arms on the top shelf, looked into the eyes of her father's photograph.

“ Is it what Joyce said? ” she asked, and there was a thin thread of pain running through the wistfulness of her voice. “ I wish you'd tell me — just as much as *you* know! — why I haven't a home like other girls — why we take to the road every summer — why you are so restless — where Mother went and why? Oh, Dad, I want to know *why!* ”

The dark head went down on her arms for a moment, and the pictured eyes smiled over the top of her wavy hair.

## CHAPTER II

### “THE RAVELED THREAD”

School had closed. Diana had gone the night before, with a ticket straight through to Canada. Cathie and her family were staying at the shore. Mary was going to camp. Only June was left of the four, and she was waiting for her father to come for her with Maryann-elizabeth. He might come at any time, too.

She sat with her chin in her hands thinking of Diana and Mary and Cathie, and the fun they would have, the gay parties they would give. And she would be — would be — She flung back her head. She would be gypsying with the greatest pal any one ever had, she told herself, loyally.

A step on the porch made her turn. Joyce Stetson stood there with her suitcase in her hand, and a discontented expression on her face.

"I can't get a taxi," she pouted. "I've waited and waited."

"Dad will be along presently," said June. "We can take you in Maryannelizabeth if you don't mind. She's rather asthmatic and has the rheumatism in her joints, and she isn't as well upholstered as she was in the days of her youth, but she's fairly comfortable."

"It's that or walk," said Joyce, a trifle ungraciously, but her eyes brightened when Maryannelizabeth came panting up the drive and stopped at the steps with an apologetic cough, as if she were just about to remark something. June was off the porch before Maryannelizabeth had stopped, and her father had swung himself over the door without stopping to open it.

"Goodness!" he laughed. "You're still growing, aren't you? Not too fine to go gyp-sying with me? Nor too 'finished'?"

"Never, Dad! Think of it, Joyce — three months of absolute freedom, to be rained on and wind-swept, and sunburnt! — Oh — have you met my father, Joyce? Miss Stetson, Dad. Can't we take her to the station? Her taxi hasn't come."

## “THE RAVELED THREAD” 27

“Surely,” assented Mr. Severne, gravely, and opened the door of the car. He helped her dispose of her suitcase and her feet while June ran back to say good-bye to Mrs. Gilligan. When she came out again, her own suitcase had been stowed away more permanently under a seat, and her father was at the wheel.

“Want to drive?” he asked as she sprang in.

“Not now, unless you want to rest?”

Maryannelizabeth seemed about to comment upon the weather, but started down the drive instead.

“I’d just love to vagabond around all summer,” said Joyce, suddenly.

June gasped.

“We enjoy it tremendously,” said Mr. Severne, and his lip tightened at one corner (which wouldn’t tell much to a stranger but which told June that he was holding in a smile).

“You stay at hotels, I suppose?”

“Sometimes.” His lips tucked in a little tighter. “But usually we just camp where we happen to be — make a camp fire, scrape a few ferns or balsam boughs together and sleep the sleep of the just.”

Maryannelizabeth nosed her way through a



traffic jam and stopped at the station platform, with a sigh of relief, finding a comfortable resting-place between two empty — accusingly empty — taxis.

Joyce looked at her watch, lingeringly, so that the sun could display the diamonds that encircled it, and saw that she had five minutes to wait for the train. She said they needn't stay, but of course they did, and Joyce told them how bored she was with the summer resorts, and gave them the history of her ancestor who fought in the Revolution, and one or two more who had done other startling things. Any one who didn't know Joyce would say that it was impossible to tell so much family history in five minutes, but any one who did know her and her technique would have said she must have been overawed by the presence of Paul Severne, the violinist, to tell so little.

At last the train came, snorting and puffing around the bend in the track, and Joyce and her suitcase and her ancestors' good deeds, were helped on board.

“Good-bye, June darling,” she called back.

The train pulled out. Paul set his hat back on his head, at a rakish angle. He looked at



June, and June looked at him, and their eyes danced.

“Let me assist you into the car,” said Paul, in imitation of Joyce’s affected air.

June tried to be severe. “I’m ashamed of you, for making fun of my friend.”

Paul grinned, a broad, small-boy grin.

“*Your* friend! I can just see you being a friend to that! If I thought you were, I’d lecture you from here to Newburyport.”

She pressed against his shoulder. “I thought you liked my friends.”

“I liked those you brought to hear me play. They’re dear little kids. I especially liked the little Irish one.”

“Cathie. Isn’t she a darling? They’re still talking about you and the violets you bought us, and the taxi! Di’s nice, too. You’ll have to meet her sometime. Her family took her to hear Olga Sergieff that night. — Do you know Olga Sergieff, Dad?”

“Don’t believe I do.”

“I thought you might. You know most of the good concert singers. They say she is stunning-looking — a Russian.”

“So I should judge. — I feel flattered that

with all these friends, some of whom actually have ancestors, and know Russian singers, you are willing to bum around with me — ”

“ Oh, Dad! Why, if it weren't for this trip every summer, I shouldn't see you at all. And I always have such thrilling adventures! Something tells me we're going to have them this trip! ”

“ You usually get your share. You can't do anything in a matter-of-fact way, no matter how commonplace the business is. It has to take some unexpected quirk as soon as you put your fingers in it.”

“ Aren't some of my adventures silly? I get out my ' Foolish Adventure Book ' sometimes and read them over and giggle to myself. I often think when I write to you that you have something else to do and ought to just throw them away unread.”

“ They're a welcome spice,” he assured her. “ I hope you will never lose that happy faculty which — which — your mother had; the faculty of seeing the romance and beauty of everyday things.”

He lapsed into silence then, as he usually did after mentioning her mother, and she gave her

attention to the road that stretched before them like a raveling of brown yarn. A raveled end of a knitted romance, she thought to herself, whimsically, or a bit of the fringe of an enchanted carpet. She decided that when she opened her new Foolish Adventure Book she would call it the Raveled Thread. A raveled thread — a clue to what? What lay before her along that twisting road?

All about them the countryside stretched in peaceful sunshine, swept by cool breezes. Dandelions and white daisies covered the meadows, acres of them — gold pieces, silver pieces, louis d’or, Spanish doubloons, pieces of eight, the argent of romance, the treasure of the year’s June flung with a lavish hand into every dusty fence corner. And, far away in the distance the hills were blue and intriguing, wrapped about with a filmy haze like a chiffon scarf. It was good just to sit there and revel in the cool breezes and the golden sunshine and the glorious sense of freedom, with no lessons for tomorrow, not even a stated time to eat nor a certain place to stop for food!

Paul was driving rather slowly, and Maryannelizabeth purred like a contented cat.

“ Where are we headed for this time? ” asked June, suddenly.

“ Through Pennsylvania.”

“ Oh.”

She had thought possibly — just possibly — the road would take them to the shore or to Canada. But then — who knew what new friends were awaiting her around the corner?

They stopped at a farmhouse for luncheon. It was not a commercial tea-room, just a hospitable private family where the housewife was willing to share what she had. To June, accustomed to the plain fare of the school, the fried chicken, fresh vegetables, green applesauce, pie, and fresh, cold milk, seemed a banquet indeed.

That was part of the fun of the gypsy life — not knowing whether the next meal would be eaten at a camp fire in a field, or at a farmhouse, or at a foreign-atmosphered tea-room in a city. Maryannelizabeth romped through open country, suburbs, and cities with equal ease. The enchanted fringe of the magic carpet slipped away beneath her wheels and was hidden in a golden glow behind her, and the things along the way were ever new.



## “THE RAVELED THREAD” 33

After luncheon, June and Anna, the oldest girl of the family, made a tour of the farm and made friends with the animals, including a pet goose which followed them and honked derisively at Maryannelizabeth. It was quiet and peaceful, there, and the orchard was cool and sweet-smelling. But Anna's eyes were wistful.

“I wish I was goin' with you,” she said. “Always on this place — never gettin' no-where — ”

“Is it your home?” asked June.

Anna's eyes widened. “Why — yes.”

“Then be glad,” said June, softly. “You don't know how much home can mean to a girl who hasn't any. Or how much beauty can mean to some city girls. I know some girls who would give a great deal to see that.”

“What?” asked Anna, looking in the general direction of June's gaze.

“That tree — and the hills.”

“The old Bartlett pear? Well — it *is* right pretty.” They walked a little way in silence. “I like pretty scenes,” she confided, presently. “If I'd 'a' had the money I could 'a' went to the State Agriculture School this summer.



Then I could 'a' took some pictures. A magazine I'm takin' gives a prize for the best photograph of a pretty scene. But — shucks — ”

“ Look here! ” June looked at her with the animated air which made her chairman of school committees that needed action. “ You get your camera and set it right here, and take a picture of that pear-tree. And turn it over that way and take a picture of those hills. Then take a picture of your house with the roses on it. Get your mother to pose at the gate — Get the hired man to lead the cow down the road — get — ”

“ Mom — hired man — cow? ” The girl's eyes expressed alarm. “ Why, they're just home things! ”

“ Why would a thing be prettier because it's twenty miles away? ”

“ Why — why — I don't know but — ”

“ Try it, and send them to the magazine. It won't hurt to try, you know. ”

June's face glowed with enthusiasm, the sunlight slanting into her long, amber eyes, and her short dark hair blowing around her face, and Anna felt somehow that this girl knew whereof she spoke.

## “THE RAVELED THREAD” 35

“ You been all over. Honest, is this place as pretty as other places? ”

“ It’s beautiful. Oh, my dear, my dear, it’s home! ”

“ Ain’t you got no home? ” Anna’s voice was husky. “ Is that why you and your paw goes around the country all summer? Gee, ain’t that too bad? What do you do winters, when it gets cold? ”

“ I go to boarding-school,” said June, quite prepared for what would come next.

“ Boarding-school? Just like the girls in books! ”

“ Why, so it is! We’re both like girls in books, aren’t we? I go to boarding-school, and you go to the one-room schoolhouse as my father did when he was a boy. I’d love to see it. Do you have spelling-bees? ”

“ Yes! And do you have midnight feasts? ”

“ Sometimes! ”

Anna smiled. “ We’re just like folks in books — you an’ me, ain’t we? There’s your paw callin’ you. I’m right sorry to see you go, June.”

“ I’ll send you a card from somewhere,” promised June. “ And you send those pic-

tures to me at school. If we stay in one place for awhile I'll let you know."

Maryannelizabeth was panting with eagerness to be off, so June hopped in at the wheel. June looked back over her shoulder and Paul waved his hand, but Anna did not see them. She was standing in the middle of the road, looking at her home, smothered in climbing roses, with her blue-clad mother at the white-washed gate.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ROMANCE OF A VANISHED JUNE

June drove all afternoon, over hills, and through villages, sleepy in the warm sunshine. And when the shadows began to lengthen she and Paul looked for a place to camp, for they wanted to spend their first night in the open. Later when the sultry days came with their sudden, violent showers, they could take shelter, but now while the glamour of the road was fresh upon them they wanted to lie beneath a tree, a camp fire at their feet, and look up to the stars.

They rode right into the sunset, enjoying every minute of it. The sky was thrillingly beautiful, with the sober tones of winter, although it was mid-June. Down close to the horizon it was a warm, rich crimson, and above were dull yellows, ashes of roses, clear, pellucid jade, argent, and amethyst shading to a sort of hyacinth blue. The clouds were black, and added a note of mystery and brooding.

They watched the changing colors shading, deepening, lightening, fading, through the pointing black fingers of the pines, and felt the awe of it steal into their hearts. It was like looking through stained glass windows and listening to some one playing *Souvenir* on the violin up in an organ loft.

They were silent as they went along. The witchery of the sunset had cast a sort of dreamy spell over them. They seemed to be traveling a silver road in an enchanted world, with music in their hearts, and a strange, mystic, tragic glow about them like the sobbing tenor of Russian music, translated into color.

At last, as the sky melted into amethyst, with one silver star in the midst of it like a beacon light, Paul suggested stopping where they were. They ran Maryannelizabeth into a little grove of trees with a clear space in the middle, and a noisy stream near by and began to make preparations for their night's sojourn.

Paul cut wood for the camp fire, plenty, for the June nights were still cool, and June made the fire and prepared the food they had. Then she brought rugs from the car and spread them upon the ground, which was rather damp and



chilly to those not accustomed to sleeping out of doors.

They feasted like kings off toasted-cheese sandwiches, some of Mrs. Johnson's chicken and doughnuts, and smoky coffee. All the food was flavored more or less with the acrid smoke of the green wood, but there was no complaint. In fact, June rather liked it.

After they had had enough, June leaned back against a tree, and watched the stars come out, and sniffed the wood-smoke and the sharp tang of crushed weeds, mint and wild onions, and the smell of the rich brown earth.

It grew darker, and the camp fire glowed like a handful of rubies on a fold of black velvet. Now and then her father would throw a fresh branch upon it, and it would crackle and snap for a time, then die down to red-hot embers again.

In a few days June would be used to the quiet, and to the thick black shadows, but now there seemed something sinister in the way all nature was holding its breath, and mysteries seemed to be creeping up to the circle of their camp fire.

She could just dimly see her father, across

the rosy glow of the fire, and she knew that his head was thrown back and he was hearing the full symphony of the night.

“Dad, — I’d like to ask you something — if I may.”

“Why the formality?” laughed Paul.

“Well — because it’s not — It’s something we don’t usually mention — ”

“Horrors! I guess I can stand it, however. Shoot. I promise not to divulge the secret, come what may, under direst torture! Cross my heart, honest Injun, and hope to turn into a peanut!”

“It’s about Mother.” She waited for a reply but none came. “I’ve been wondering — Last winter Joyce said — Joyce said — mothers do that sometimes.”

There was a slight pause. “Do what?” Paul’s voice came from out of the shadows, and June’s keen ear could not tell what emotion the calm words hid. “Do what, June? It’s best to speak plainly — whether Joyce did or not.”

“Well — get tired of their husbands and find their babies too much trouble and — ”

“Did Joyce *tell* you that?” Paul’s voice actually seemed tinged with amusement.

“No. But she said it and I overheard it. I wish you could have heard Cathie light into her! Of course all the girls know that I haven’t any one but you and they are curious about — Mother — and I can’t tell them anything. I’ve thought of it as a mystery but — not — a disgrace.”

“And now what do you want to know?” Paul’s voice was cold, as it always was when she pried into his affairs. It was unmistakably placarded, “Keep out. No trespassing. Beware the Dog. Mad Bull.”

But June went on recklessly. “I want to know whether it is true, and what really happened to Mother.” She said it staunchly enough, although her heart beat quickly and she caught her breath at her daring.

There was another short silence, and then Paul’s voice in a different tone.

“I suppose you have been wondering. You are growing up. It is painful to me, June — ”

“I know, Dad, but — ”

“Wait. I’ll tell you some of it.”

“You are like your mother in many ways — not in looks, but in personality. I met her at college. I was playing in the orchestra and she

sang in the glee club. When the combined musical clubs went on tour we were thrown together quite often. We worked out a few songs together and had a little 'act' of our own which was always well received. We worked together and we played together. She was the finest pal a man ever had.

"After we graduated, we married, and toured the country-side giving concerts, and having fun. She was like you — she could see the fun in the commonplace mishaps, and many a time her lilting laugh — her elfin chuckle would turn tragedy into comedy, and discouragement into a keen zest to play the game to the finish in spite of obstacles.

"We spent two summers that way. The next summer we stayed at home, for I had a regular position with an orchestra as soloist. But the following summer, when you were two years old, we went to Europe, and spent the whole two months of June and July, traveling through the old world in a brightly colored gypsy cart with a donkey named Anatol.

"That's the way to see Europe, June — laze through it on foot or with a donkey, especially a very temperamental donkey like ours.



“ In August we reached a little town, a town of steeply pointed roofs, of narrow, twisting, cobbled streets, down which girls in flaring white headdresses drove flocks of geese. I can still see the girls’ fluttering red skirts, and hear their wooden shoes clacking along in time to the geese’s honking.

“ I can see one house in particular, reached by a particularly villainous stretch of steep, sharply paved street. It had a high, pointed gable, and quaint latticed windows, and a flag-stoned floor inside with a deep, century-old fireplace where generations of *grand’mères* and *grandpères* had bickered querulously through the twilight of their years, and busy housewives’ spinning-wheels had hummed, and youths and maids had whispered shy nothings to each other, and dreamy-eyed mothers had crooned lullabies to their wee ones and seen visions in the flames. And there were old pewter flagons, and burnished brasses that caught the glow of the flames in the old stone fireplace.

“ Near by there was a canal which flowed peacefully along under willows, mirroring them exactly. We liked to walk there in the moonlight — Olive and I, while the housewife cared



for you asleep in the little chamber under the pointed gable.

“ One evening, while we walked, we heard a sudden commotion, something like distant thunder, with a rattle of rain. We stopped and listened.

“ Then came a shrill whine, followed by a deafening explosion. The unexpectedness of it stunned us for a moment, then we realized that the whole town was in flames, and that the church in the quaint square, and the square itself, were but a single shapeless mass of masonry from which the dust still rose. Above the crackle of the flames we could hear the screams of women and the muffled oaths of men, and then they poured out of every doorway and ran to the burning buildings. One of them was the house in which we had left you.

“ Olive recovered first and realized the danger and got her bearings. ‘ The house!’ she screamed. ‘ June is there!’ I left her and ran. I tore up that narrow street, leaping over débris and taking chances under tottering walls, and into the flaming building. A bucket brigade had been formed and the priceless old furniture was being carried out. Some

of it was piled in the crooked stairway. But I stopped for nothing. I could hear you screaming upstairs and nothing could have held me back.

“ I found you unharmed, only frightened by the strange excitement and the loud noise. I gathered our things together hastily and took you out, and gave you into the care of the half-crazed *grand'mère*, giving her something to do beside look on at the destruction of her home. And then I helped those gallant men to do what they could. That place was doomed, but the next houses were saved. It was morning when we were through, although it seemed almost a worthless undertaking, for the news came that a neighboring city was being bombarded and that stray shells might come again and finish the work. We could hear the heavy booming of the big guns quite plainly when we stopped to take breath. When the last, flickering spark had been quenched, we thought of breakfast, and the men went to their homes. I took you from the *grand'mère*, who sat crushed in the ruins, and began a search for your mother. The search has continued to this day.”

"But, what happened?"

"I don't know."

"Where *could* she have gone?"

"I don't know. But I am sure she is not dead. If she were, something inside me would know it. That is why I know so many professional singers, and why I accept all the publicity I can get for myself. I hope that some time our trails will cross. That is why we take to the road each summer. But it is becoming increasingly difficult. A trail can be lost entirely in a month in a city like New York. Think then what can happen in fifteen years, with the whole of America to consider — working on the supposition that she found her way back to America."

"You'd think she would go to our old home, wouldn't you?"

"I did think that. I went there at once. She has dropped out of life as completely as if the earth had swallowed her up."

"Her friends and relatives ——"

"They haven't heard from her. *They* consider her dead. But I know better. They think I am slightly 'touched' on the matter, but I don't care. I know. It may be, of course,

as Joyce says, that she found life with me intolerable —— ”

“ Oh, Dad! How could she? ”

“ Would you? ”

“ Of course not! And I’m sure she didn’t! You were the man she *married*! Don’t you see she couldn’t? ”

“ Yes, I do see. And so I have not lost hope.” His voice trailed away to silence. He reached over to put another branch on the fire and the flames lighted up his face. It looked old and sad.

June’s mind was in a whirl. The mystery *was* a mystery, not a sordid scandal; the haunting uncertainty was gone, and she trusted her mother as Paul did. She remembered the invitations to go to Canada and to the shore and to camp, and she was glad that she had refused. Poor, lonely Dad! Living in silence, with a horrible memory like that — chasing false clues, following blind trails, failing and starting all over again.

“ I’ve heard people say your music came from a broken heart,” said June, softly, “ and I believe it does.”

“ More than you know. It transformed me



from a jazz vaudeville artist to a soloist in a symphony orchestra. It changed me from a boy touring the country for fun, to a man working for love. In a way, it was worth it. Why, Kid!" For she had come swiftly through the shadows and flung herself against him, gripping him fiercely. He felt her sobbing stormily, and he swallowed twice — hard.

"I'm so glad it wasn't as Joyce said," she cried, a little wildly, "but how horrible!"

"We're doing everything we can," he said, gently. "So don't think any more about it. It all happened a long time ago, you know, and it doesn't help to worry about it now. I wouldn't have told you at all, only you needed to have an answer for all the Joyces there are in this world."

"I'm glad to know — and I don't see why I ever doubted her — knowing *you*."

"Then don't think about it any more. Roll up in your blanket and go to sleep. I'll see that the fire goes out safely."

"All right. Don't stay up too late."

"I won't. Good night, June."

But the fire died down to black embers, cov-



ered with a light film of gray dust of ash; the shadows were blacker than ever. And after a long while the moon came up and balanced itself on the top of a pine and threw a silver sheen over the velvet shadows, and he still sat there by the symbolic dead ashes of his fire. Through his mind marched a line of grizzled men with a crowd of women and children running after them, their wooden shoes clacking on the sharply paved, steeply climbing street that ran between quaint houses with latticed windows and pointed roofs, a crowd that shouted and wept, and sang the Marseillaise.

## CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH THEY MIGHT, AND AGAIN THEY  
MIGHTN'T, AND THEY DON'T.

There is nothing else quite so alluring as the sunlight of early morning, slanting through the leaves and plunging into the depths of a quiet pool. At no other time in the day is the sunlight so golden, at no other time are the leaves so fragilely green and tender, at no other time is the pool so full of beckoning lights and shadows.

June had decided the night before, that the mirror-like pool was deep — deep enough for swimming, anyway, and now she stood poised upon an out-flung ledge of rock, a slim, red-clad figure against the gray of the rock and the green of the dwarf trees about her. But in the act she paused, surveyed the calm surface, and then came down from the ledge, and waded into the water. In a moment she was lost, except for her red cap which floated on the top like a

large red water-lily bud. Then even that disappeared, stayed under for a few seconds, and then emerged closer to shore. She drew herself up to the bank and climbed the ledge again. This time she finished her dive, cutting the air in a clean arc, and striking the water in the middle of the pool where it was deep.

When she came up she saw her father on the shore and waved a dripping arm at him. She swam in toward him.

“It’s great for diving, Dad! The bottom is just as clean as if it had been swept. Try it from the ledge.”

Paul looked at the ledge and then at the pool, and he clambered up the rough rock.

“Here’s a new dive a Swedish instructor taught me at the Y. M. last winter!” he shouted. “Watch!”

June laughed at his unconscious attitude of a small boy showing off, and watched. It was a beautiful dive, and she applauded.

“I’m a little too heavy,” he said, shaking the wet hair out of his eyes. “There was a girl at one of the exhibition meets — a tall, fair, slim girl. She could dive like an arrow from a bow, and it was like listening to music just to

watch her. You try it. It's a striking exhibition dive!"

They climbed out upon the bank again and both mounted to the ledge. He explained the way her shoulders should move, and cautioned her against flinging them too much, as she might strain her back. Then she tried it. The first time fizzled, and she performed what Paul called a "spread-eagle dive," barely saving herself from hitting the water a breath-taking whack.

She climbed out and tried it again, with rather better success this time. With two more attempts she had mastered it, and could do it better than her father, who watched her with delight.

"That will be a good stunt to spring on the girls!" she laughed. "I can just see Cathie trying it! Cathie always shuts her eyes when she dives and she reminds us of a rubber ball bouncing. She's so round and fat. She just throws herself in and comes up puffing and snorting and sort of wallows over to the edge of the pool. We nearly die laughing at her, and the new swimming instructor almost had hysterics the first time she saw her 'dive.' She



says she's going to reduce this summer if she has to starve to death! Poor Cathie! She laughs too much ever to get thin!"

Paul took a sidelong glance at her as she sat on the ledge and looked out over the sun-flecked water. There was a wistfulness in her eyes that made him wonder. June was changed this summer, with an indefinable something about her which reminded him poignantly of her mother.

She roused herself with a little shake. "We really ought to eat this morning," she laughed. "You can swim around a little more, and I'll see about breakfast."

"There's wood all ready, June. I think I shall take another dip." But still he sat there in the sunlight, looking into the brown and gold depths of the pool, and seeing instead the silver band of a calm canal and the black and silver of moonlit willows.

When he returned, June was dressed and bustling about the fire, which did double duty by drying her wet bathing suit and cooking bacon on a stick. He sniffed the fragrance of coffee, and traced it to the battered coffee-pot which had been removed to a less dangerous



place on the edge of the fire, having boiled over and nearly put out the blaze. Now it was percolating with little gulps and gurgles.

Paul hung his bathing suit beside June's where it began to steam, and putting his hands in his pockets surveyed the scene. He smiled at the removed coffee-pot, and June's flushed cheeks, and the blowing strands of her ruffled hair.

"You look as if you've just been having a thick time," he remarked.

"I did," she chuckled. "The coffee boiled over, and the bathing suit fell off the limb and caught the end of the bacon stick and hurled it into the fire. But I rescued everything in time. The fire's still in, and the bacon's just a wee bit scorched, and if I have to I can go swimming again to wash the ashes off the bathing suit. Aside from that everything's — ouch! — *hotsy-totsy* now! Sit down there and I'll let you toast the bread."

He obediently sat down amid the mint and wild onions and held a slice of bread on a stick over a flame.

June fished roasted eggs from the hot ashes, and passed him a slice of bacon, and breakfast

was on the way. The aromatic weeds and the fresh air and the wood smoke were all inextricably mixed with the natural flavors of the toast and egg and bacon.

June smiled suddenly, then as her father's eyebrows lifted questioningly: "I was just thinking what Di would say if she were here! She is the healthiest person you can imagine, but she's always on her guard against something terrible — nervous sick headache or indigestion or typhoid. She's afraid to pick autumn leaves because she doesn't know which are poison ivy, and she's too wary to take a chance. She would think this bacon was poisoned for sure, and taste arsenic in the coffee. What do you suppose *is* in this coffee, Dad? Doesn't it taste queer?"

"Smoke probably. Did you throw out the grounds?"

"Why — no. Should I have done so?"

"Sure. Did you put more in?"

"No. I just poured water in it."

Paul laughed. "As a camp-fire artist you may not be much of a success, but you'd be the delight of a Scotchman's heart!"

June laughed with him, and chewed medi-

tatively. It was like Dad to joke gallantly, and to make no reference to the story he had told the night before. She admired him all the more for his casualness, for even though it was an old story to him, the telling of it had aroused sleeping memories and opened old wounds.

Breakfast over, they washed the coffee-pot, rolled up the now dry bathing suits, threw a cup of water on the dead ashes of the camp fire, just to make sure, and took to the road again.

Their way led through pleasant fields and rolling hills, with here and there bright threads of streams wandering wilfully through green meadows where cows looked at them and chewed ruminatively. At intervals they passed farmhouses, some of them run down and sadly in need of paint, others well kept and prosperous-looking, with flowers in the door-yards, and shady trees over rocky spring-houses.

At noon they stopped at a village which boasted a hotel, and had their lunch. And they gave Maryannelizabeth a nice drink of cold gasoline which she seemed to appreciate.

A group of loafers at the garage asked ques-

tions about their route and why they were traveling that way, and gave conflicting information when Paul asked them the distance to the nearest town.

“Can we make it to-night?” asked Paul.

“Well, ye might,” said one of them, eyeing Maryannelizabeth dubiously. “And then again, ye mightn’t.”

“That,” said Paul, solemnly, “is always a more or less remote contingency.”

“Sure ye kin,” said another. “I bet ye!”

“It depends on what ye’re sellin’,” hinted another, looking curiously into the back seat. “An’ how long it’ll take ye at every place ye stop.”

“Course ye kin,” said an old man, querulously, his spiky beard making a circular motion before his face as he chewed industriously. He spat neatly. “Why, many’s the time before the Civil War ——” The others interrupted him with hoots and shouts of derision.

“In case ye try to make it,” said the garage man, leisurely, leaning against his gasoline pump, “ye can make better time if ye turn off at the crossroads. Ye go right on till ye come to a range of hills quite some piece away, but



ye can see 'em, ye understand. The road ye're on now is white, but this here now crossroad is red clay. (Ain't that one o' these here now quincidents?) Right there at the crossroads is an old house what folks says is ha'nted. It's got a weepin' willer in the front yard. Take the left branch of that there now red road, an' it'll fetch ye out at the town. How's the air in yer chubes? "

"An' that's the kind o' fellers we had in them days," finished the old man in his quavery voice, his beard making a series of agitated circles before his face, and he spat neatly into the dust.

"Is the house haunted?" June asked the old man.

The bleared old blue eyes lightened.

"Eh? Ha'nted? Whut-fur house, eh?"

"The house at the crossroads!" yelled the garage man.

"Oh, eh. I'm a mite deaf in me ears. Ha'nted? That it is. I've seen the ha'nt meself, what's more. Second sight I've got. It run't in me fambly for years back. We seen things mortal eyes don't of-ten see."

"How many drinks had you had when ye



seen 'em?" asked one of the men, with a wink at the others.

"A big, black figger it is, like a shadow, sorter. An' it howls — 'Oo-wow,' it goes — 'Oo-wow!' like that!"

The men went into convulsions, but the old man went on placidly. "Ye know ye're in a ha'nted house be the looks of it — with the old weepin' willy tree in the yard, an' the deserted look to the place. Nobody'll live in it. Sperrits."

"Yeah," scoffed the garage man. "The kind what comes out of a bottle. Me, I don't believe in no sperrits."

"Oh, ye don't, don't ye," shouted the old man, unexpectedly hearing. "Then it's a hurrytick's whut ye are. A hurrytick — one o' them there *on*-believers. Not believin' in sperrits what I've see wid me own eyes."

"But what's the story of it?" asked June.

The old man glared defiance at the garage man, and then spat indignantly into the road, before he answered. "I don't jes' remember. 'Twas along about the time o' the Civil War. A young girl lived there be the name of — Sally — Sally — Wait an' it'll come to me —

Sally Anne Peters her name were! She was goin' to marry a young felly, an' he went off to war. The Civil War it were. Aye. He was in the same comp'ny as I was meself. An' he was kilt an' she never got over it. Broke her heart. Since then she's ha'nted the place. A big black shadow it is, with a wailin' an' a clankin' o' chains."

He lapsed into silence, his faded blue eyes seeing again the young chap who had marched away with him when all the world was young and gay.

"Well, thanks, anyway," said Paul, and Maryannelizabeth began to cough.

The old man formed a topic for half-humorous raillery for part of the afternoon. Paul knew some other funny old men, and he told June about them, with the tenderness with which one tells of very small children.

"I suppose when we get old we'll sit around the firesides and tell about the time we fought. And our grandchildren will roll up their eyes and sigh when we begin. Only instead of Manassas and Gettysburg and Lookout Mountain, it will be the Marne, and Argonne, Chateau Thierry, and Belleau Wood."

## IN WHICH THEY MIGHT 61

And then they told ghost stories, and at the psychological moment, Maryannelizabeth picked up a tack, and suffered horribly.

Paul put an emergency first-aid patch on her front off wheel, and told her she was perfectly all right. But she knew better, and insisted upon limping. And then to complicate things the sky clouded over and thunder rattled ominously.

"We can't make town, after all," he frowned. "Guess it's us for the haunted house. What say, June? Game?"

"Pooh!" laughed June. "Who cares? I'm not afraid of a spook. I never saw one, did you? That tale sounded fishy, too. Who ever heard of the ghost of a young girl being a big black shadow, wailing and dragging a chain? I'd rather meet the ghost than attempt to sleep outside to-night, anyway."

Paul looked at the piling clouds. "Impossible," he said firmly. "Sleeping outside is not to be thought of!"

Maryannelizabeth limped along, and the sky became more and more overcast. The clouds turned a lurid, sulphurous yellow, split now and then by a blue flash of lightning. The whole world was lit up by the unearthly

glare which made the grass and trees a vivid green and lent an air of unreality to the whole scene.

Then came the downpour, and Maryannelizabeth had just time to stagger valiantly through the gateposts of a house and into the shelter of a shed. June ran for the porch, leaving Paul to follow with his precious violin caught up under his raincoat together with some of the perishable articles of food.

There in the friendly shelter of the porch June noticed for the first time the desolate appearance of the house. It was unpainted, with sagging doors and shutters hanging by one hinge, and in the dooryard stood a melancholy tree, a willow-tree, its long, green branches waving to and fro like the hair of some drowned mermaid. It struck a chill to her heart as she surveyed it. There was something eerie and gruesome about the whole deserted place that made June falter on the threshold.

But she shook off her feeling of depression as her father returned after a second dash for provisions, and she stood in the doorway, inviting him to enter with an hospitable gesture.

"You are welcome," she said, "to what we

have. We try to make you welcome and comfortable at 'The Sign of the Weepin' Willy'!" And even as she said it, she felt a gruesomeness that seemed almost to cause her hair to rise.



## CHAPTER V

### AT THE SIGN OF THE WEEPIN' WILLY

“ ‘ The Sign of the Weepin' Willy ’,” echoed Paul, and looked around him. He noted the weeping willow tree in the rainwashed front yard, the discouraged droop of the front gate, the river of white clay and water which mingled with a river of red clay and water where the two roads came together, and he understood. “ The haunted house! ” he laughed. “ And it looks the part. Are you game, June? Or shall we push on after it stops raining? ”

“ It isn't going to stop,” said June, with a weather-wise look at the sky. “ No, I don't mind staying here all night.” She repressed a shudder as the chill hand of foreboding clutched at her heart. “ Whew! It smells musty and mouldy in here, doesn't it? I'll bet it hasn't been aired in a month of Sundays! ”

They passed through the damp hall and into

a somewhat lighter room with a fireplace in it. The light which came through the curtain of falling rain was cold and bleak, but there was at least no view of the gruesome drowned willow mermaid in the front yard. They decided to make that room their headquarters, and continued their tour of exploration. They found wood in abundance in a lean-to by the back door, and a tall candle in the kitchen. So, after Paul had made a final trip to the car for rugs and cushions, they made themselves comfortable.

The big, bare room became more cheerful after the fire had taken the chill off the air, and as dusk fell it became actually cozy, with a sense of warmth and comfort and protection against the rain which swished against the windows and rattled on the roof. The fire crackled merrily, and the glow of the flames danced over the walls, and made rosy flickers in the black window panes.

Paul, sitting on the floor, with his arms around his knees, looked across at June who half reclined on a rug, resting her weight on her elbow.

“Here’s another adventure for your book,”

he grinned. "A night in a haunted house. If the ghost walks, I trust you to write a full description of it, and to keep your head no matter whether the ghost has hers or not."

June pretended to be skeptical. "Pshaw! Spooks!"

"It's strange," went on Paul, thoughtfully, "the fear that people have for the supernatural. There are the voodoos of the negro, and their medicine men and witch doctors; the *nats* of the Burmese, and hundreds of other superstitions of heathen races. And even the civilized nations are not immune.

"The Irish are particularly superstitious. They have a whole mythology about the little folk, who were supposed to have been angels, and were banished for some reason, and compelled to live in hills called *shees*. Some were good and some were bad, and they frequently warred with each other. Sometimes the strife was so fierce that the meadows were drenched with blood. The Irish lived in terror of them, for accidentally to overhear fairy music might doom unlucky eavesdroppers to insanity. Or they might be bewitched, made to dance all night to the sound of fairy pipes, or used as steeds for

some hobgoblin's nocturnal wanderings and left exhausted at daybreak. And of course the wail of the banshee has become a figure of speech. The dullaghans were terrible creatures, too. They haunted cemeteries and played football with each other's heads. And woe to the luckless man who saw one of them!

"Other countries have their superstitions, too. A particularly michievous ghost comes from Germany. He is called '*poltergeist*,' and loves to play malicious tricks on unsuspecting people — such as pulling their hair, snatching chairs from under them, pinching them, etc.

"Even in present days, it is a sorry village which does not have at least one haunted house, and every castle in Europe has some tradition of a white lady or a knight in armor or similar specter which appears at certain times.

"It is strange that we all have that ecstatic horror of ghosts. I have heard gray-haired men seriously arguing about the existence of spirits, and swapping experiences which they claim are true."

"What do you think, Dad?"

He smiled. "I don't know. The longer



you live, June, the more you will realize that man's knowledge is limited — very limited even in physical matters, and that he is a child when it comes to understanding psychic things, including religion. The Irish have what that old soldier to-day called 'second sight.' They see things that the average less finely attuned, or more practical person, does not see. But the fact that an unemotional, practical chap doesn't believe in fairies and good and evil spirits, never having seen any, doesn't prove that there are no such things. A man without sight might argue that there is no such thing as light, a color-blind man might say there are no varying colors. We know differently because we are so constructed that we can see. Whether there is a more perfect spiritual sight than most of us have, or whether those who claim to have seen spirits are merely victims of hallucinations, I don't know. But the study of primitive folklore is an interesting study. Get a book of Irish myths some time. They are delightful."

"Did *you* ever see a spirit, Dad?"

"No."

"We tell ghost stories at school sometimes," said June, "and Cathie's eyes get so big and

round, and she shivers and her teeth chatter, and she has nightmare all night. But yet she will listen!"

"Sure. That's the Celt. But there, we shouldn't have started on this subject at all. You'll be having all kinds of wild dreams to-night."

"Hardly! There's no Celtic strain in me!"

"Perhaps not, but there's a wide streak of the mystic in you, or I miss my guess."

"Mystic?" Somehow June had always connected the word with magnetic-eyed Indian fakirs. "In me? Why?"

"Well — for instance — your love of nature. You look at a tree and it means something more than a plant."

"The drowned mermaid," leaped suddenly from June's lips, and she laughed at her father's blank look, and explained.

"There, you see? Mysticism."

"Dreaminess, in other words."

"Partly. That faculty which permits a person to see a thing and penetrate to a deeper meaning behind it — rhythm of purpose in the universe."

"Oh, I think I understand. Then poets and

musicians and dancers and artists would be mystics? ”

“ If they go beneath the surface of things, yes. And preachers, and teachers, and scores of others in greater or lesser degree.”

She laughed. “ I’ll tell Miss Morehouse that when she accuses me of woolgathering again. Thanks for the lecture on — er — anthropology, psychic phenomena, and metaphysics.”

“ You’re growing up,” remarked Paul, soberly. “ Don’t bother your head with such double-jointed words. — I think it’s time we went to bed. Think the rain and the weighty discourse will keep you awake? ”

“ I guess not,” she said, valiantly.

Not for worlds would she have confessed that she dreaded being alone in that bare upstairs room, with the morbid willow keeping tryst with a ghost in the front yard! She listened to the rain hissing against the window panes and dripping from the eaves.

“ No,” she repeated. “ I’ll go right to sleep, Dad.”

“ Take up an extra rug, June, in case it gets colder in the night.”

She held out an arm and he laid a rug across

it, and tucked a cushion under the other arm.

“ I’ll be in the room across the hall,” he went on, “ so if the spook gets you, just yell, and I’ll be Johnnie-on-the-spot.”

“ I’m not afraid,” she repeated, with a laugh. “ And no spook will get me! ” She brandished her flashlight, and then had to retrieve her cushion.

“ Well, if you see one, don’t be selfish about it. Call me so I can see it, too! Night, June.”

June sighed as she surveyed the hardwood floor and her rug, but decided to make the best of it. She rolled up in her rug, and flung the extra one down near by, within reach, then with the cushion under her head she prepared to sleep.

She determined to keep her mind away from the topic of ghosts, but it was not easily controlled. Again and again she caught herself listening for something, and straining her eyes through the gloom, and almost imagining she heard things. She lectured herself severely about it.

“ You’re being very silly! Now forget about it! ”



She was singularly wakeful, although she had arisen early that morning. Her mind was busy creating things, and worried the ghost subject like a terrier worrying a bone.

“Goodness,” she thought, “I wonder if writers of ghost stories feel like this when they are creating their shapes of darkness. . . .

“I believe I could write one. Wouldn't it be fun to plan a ghost story right here in the haunted house and write it and sell it for hundreds of dollars without telling Dad anything about it until the check came? Wouldn't he be surprised?

“Let's see — ‘The Enchanted Room’ — a room in an inn — old-time, Revolutionary or French — villainous innkeeper — traveler — charming room. The sleeper wakes in the middle of the night and sees room completely changed — windows smaller, doors twisted about, furniture unfamiliar, and in center of the room, phantoms holding horrid revels. The principal character should be a man — a handsome young man — who is touring the country in a car named Anatol. He comes to a picturesque inn and asks a night's lodging. The innkeeper gives him this room. The inn-

keeper should be a queer sort of person — sinister — that's a good word. (Isn't it fun to plot stories?) And the room should be dark, with little latticed windows. In the front yard is a tree — a willow, with its green hair streaming in the wind.

“The traveler goes to bed and awakes in the middle of the night and sees the moonlight in a square on the floor, and in the middle of it two dullaghans are playing football with their heads — No, that won't do. That's typically Irish, and this scene is laid in France. The phantoms would be — would be — courtiers of the time of Louis XIV fighting a duel for a lady, and the lady would be sitting in terror looking on. And she would be so beautiful that the young man would fall in love with her. And he would come back each year to see her phantom in the room, and at last commit suicide because she could not love him and he could not embrace her ghostly form. Tragedy! Ah, that's the thing to write. Something that will wring the reader's heart with anguish — a good phrase, that.

“I hope I can remember all these good things and put them in my notebook to-morrow!”

“ Now for more detail about the hero. He should be a musician or a poet —— ”

She turned over, restlessly, and looked toward the light blur of the window. Then she sat up and stared. Outlined against the dull, windowframed square of sky was a hunched-up figure, massed against the somewhat lesser gloom without, vaguely poised above the sill. It had the general outline of misshapen dwarf, and sat motionless, brooding like Poe's raven, a thing out of a nightmare. The longer she looked at it, the more ghastly it became. She could even make out burning eyes deep in the blackness. But that last, she told herself with a kind of desperate practicality, was her imagination, or an illusion of her straining eyes.

She resolutely turned her back on the Thing, and then peeked over her shoulder. It was still there.

Her trembling hand reached for her flashlight, and at first was too nerveless to press the button. The second time it clicked and a stream of light shone full upon the form. It was the heaped-up extra rug. The light clicked out, and June curled up under her rug and laughed softly. What an adventure for her

Foolish Adventure Book! Wouldn't she have a good time telling it to the girls at school? She could imagine Cathie's wide eyes, and hear her sharply in-drawn breath as she approached the climax.

The exertion of sitting up, or the swift transition from terror to laughter and from tragedy to a ridiculous foolish adventure dispelled the horror and she composed herself to sleep.

Her eyes dropped heavily, and she seemed floating away on a sea of amber, shot through with gold. . . .

She started awake. She thought she had heard something and lay, breathlessly, listening. But the quiet room reassured her, and she dozed. Again she started. She *had* heard a noise!

It was a kind of scuffling, scratching noise, like something climbing the stairs. *Shuff*, *shuff*, and then a muffled, metallic clink. June's hair rose on end, and her flesh crawled. The ghost — with the chain — It was coming toward the door — *shuff* — *shuff* — *clink*. Whatever it was, it was not human. She knew that by the sound of the footsteps, and the faint scratching, and a sniffing noise. The door



swung open with a creak of hinges. June, petrified with horror, wished that she had locked the door, and then the next instant was glad she had not. It would have been too terrible to hear the Thing come right through a locked door! But worst of all was the feeling of a Presence in the room, and a faint, almost imperceptible odor — a damp, musty odor as of — something from the grave —

June's nerves gave way, suddenly, as the Thing uttered a low moan. She screamed with all the power of her lusty lungs.

From across the hall her father shouted a sleep-befogged reply. "Hold fast! Don't let go!" Then a pause in which the Thing dashed against a wall with an unearthly clatter, and the door slowly swung shut.

"June!" Paul sounded more awake, now. "Did you call, June?"

"Dad! Come quick! It's in my room!" The power returned to her paralyzed muscles, and she dashed out, shutting the door behind her.

Paul met her in the hall, with a flashlight. He was smiling, but when he saw her face he grew sober.

“What did you see, Kid?”

“I heard it — Listen!”

She leaned against him, weakly, and she felt the arm which supported her stiffen as the sounds reached him. He laid a hand on the latch of the door, and she put hers over it.

“Don’t, Dad, — It’s horrible — Don’t look —”

“Don’t look, if you don’t want to,” he said gently, and June hid her eyes against his arm while he opened the door, and she shuddered as he stood for a moment motionless on the threshold.

Then she heard him chuckle. “June, as a ghost-catcher you’re better than any Celt I ever saw! Look!”

June cautiously uncovered one eye and peeked along the finger of light from the flash. Blinking in the spot of light was a poor, bedraggled terrier of uncertain lineage — part Scotch and part Irish, with a dash of Airedale and an air of daschhund, and all hair and pleading brown eyes. His hair was wet, and from it arose the odor of mustiness which suggested an old grave. And some mischievous urchin had tied to its tail an old can.

June dropped to her knees and gathered the shivery body into her arms. "Oh, Dad, he's just a bundle of bones. No wonder he clanked like a skeleton when he walked! Let's give him a piece of ham and some milk."

Paul laughed. "You'll never get rid of him if you do!"

"I don't care! I want to keep him. Can't we? We need a mascot — I mean a watchdog. And I've never had a pet —"

It was hard to tell which made the deeper appeal, June's pleading eyes, glowing like topazes in the light from the flash, or the dog's eyes turned up to her face in sudden, but unwavering devotion.

Paul choked suddenly. "All right, June. Keep him."

June gathered him up, can and all, and dodged a caress from a pink tongue. "We'll call him Willy," she said, happily.

"Willy?"

"Yes, in memory of the drowned mermaid, the Weepin' Willy keeping tryst with a wailing spook."

"You do think of the nicest things," gasped Paul.

## CHAPTER VI

### A KNIGHT ERRANT AND A MAID A-DREAM

After Willy had been fed, and the can removed from his tail, and his fur dried off somewhat, June and her father went back to bed, and this time June slept until the sunlight shone through the window on her face, and the fragrance of boiling coffee assailed her nostrils.

She sat up, and Willy, having been curled on her feet, with one eye open and one ear cocked for the next move, jumped up and yapped joyfully. His can was gone, he smelt good things to eat, some one loved him at last, and it was good to be alive.

June thought the same thing as she looked out into the garden and sniffed the rain-cooled air. She could hear her father whistling downstairs, and somewhere in the willow tree a bird was pouring out showers of golden notes. The world was very beautiful.



When June came down with Willy under her arm, her father looked up from the broiling bacon with a broad grin.

“ Good morning, Ghost-Catcher Extraordinary! ” he hailed. “ Did you catch any more spooks? ”

“ No,” she laughed. “ Twice was enough for one night.”

“ Twice? ”

“ I forgot you didn't know about the other. I'll tell you while we eat.”

They had another picnic breakfast, spread upon the floor with Paul on one side of their paper cloth, and June on the other, within easy reach of the coffee-pot and the bacon, while Willy sat between them and watched both impartially.

And as they ate June told of the adventure with the rug, and her father laughed helplessly, while Willy watched the bread and bacon disappearing. Sometimes when Paul laughed Willy would look in his direction and thump his tail, hopefully. The bacon was almost gone, and just a little milk remained in the bottle, and there was just a small piece of bread. Willy began to get worried. He licked his

nose, suggestively, but no one paid any attention. He thumped his tail, and no one paid any attention. Then he whined. Paul paused in the act of reaching for the bacon; June paused in the act of reaching for the bread; and they both looked at the furry scrap wriggling with eagerness.

“Poor Willy,” said June, and he thumped his tail again at the tone in her voice. “We almost forgot him, talking about spooks, so we did! Do you really want that bacon, Dad?”

“No, give it to Willy, and the rest of the bread and the milk. He can’t be terribly hungry, though, after all we gave him to eat last night.”

Willy confirmed Paul’s opinion by eating the bacon and drinking the milk, and taking the bread out and burying it. June watched him. “H’m,” she remarked, thoughtfully. “That solves the garbage problem, doesn’t it?”

After breakfast, Paul carried the rugs and cushions and violin out to the car again, and put a more comfortable patch on Maryannelizabeth’s sore wheel so that she ran without so much protest, and then June climbed up next

to him in the front seat, with Willy between them, and they were off again.

As they passed between the sagging gateposts, June looked back at the house, which, seen in the morning sunlight, somehow seemed less desolate, and waved her hand to the willow tree which stood like a fairy princess with diamonds in her blowing hair.

"I almost hate to leave," she sighed, as Maryannelizabeth turned down the red road toward the village. "Two adventures in one night give me a friendly feeling for a place. — Willy, I wish you wouldn't lick my chin. It isn't sanitary."

"I hope we're not making a mistake by bringing that pup along," said Paul, pessimistically. "What breed is he, anyway?"

"He's a spook hound," said June, regarding him thoughtfully. "With a dash of adventure terrier in him."

"I believe you," laughed Paul.

"He'll run adventures to cover, and we'll only need to sneak up behind him and shoot them," went on June, and she was more nearly right than she knew. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Willy, several things might not have hap-

pened which did happen, and this tale might never have been told.

They coasted down a steep hill, and June threw back her head to feel the wind's fingers in her hair, while Willy barked hilariously.

"What town is this," asked June after a moment, "and do we stop to-day or did we just want to stay there over night?"

Paul hesitated. "It's the town of Hilton, and we do want to stop there. Maryannelizabeth thinks she's still suffering, so we'll leave her to the tender mercies of a garage man, and — I have an address I'd like to look up."

"An address?"

"An address furnished by a private detective."

She looked at him, but he did not turn. His eyes were fastened on the road before them. Her heart gave a sudden jump. Her mother! Perhaps they had found her!

"Is — is it — certain?"

"Perhaps. It never has been before, but there has to be a final time. If the others had been right, we wouldn't still be looking, would we?"

"Like that old conundrum, 'Why do you



always find a thing in the last place you look? Because when you find it you stop looking.' "

Her voice sounded frivolous, but it covered a tumult in her heart. She hadn't realized before that they were actually following a trail which might lead to her mother. It made her feel like a knight on a quest. It gave an additional zest to their vagabonding, a new possibility for unexpected adventure, a new hope for the journey's end.

As they sped along, she began to dream of the time when they would find her mother, for there was something contagious in Paul's belief that she still lived.

She pictured her tall and stately, with a pleasant face, a happy laugh, a sweet voice. And they would live in a little house by themselves, near enough to school so that June could bring her friends home. And there would be a garden with flowers and a sundial, and perhaps a tennis court in the back. And inside would be books and a piano, and comfortable chairs. And she could go and come without having to sign a card to say when she went and when she came back. And she could bring her friends and they could sing and pop corn and play

games, or just talk without having an older person sitting there smiling indulgently every time one of them caught her eye. They could talk extravagantly, and plan preposterous things to be carried out in a rush of enthusiasm and laughed about afterward. She could even bring boys home — that nice boy she had met at the Yale-Harvard game the time she went up with Di.

But usually they would be together — just the three of them. She would study in the living-room, and Paul would read his paper, and Mother — well, Mother would just go around mothering. Sometimes she would sing, perhaps, and Paul would play on his violin and Willy would lie on the hearth-rug and dream about chasing spooks or burying garbage.

Perhaps the house would have a steeply slanting roof like the one they just passed — a white stucco house with blue shutters and a blue door with a brass knocker on it — and hollyhocks against the wall and a hedge with a white gate set in it — and blue larkspur in the front yard.

“Dad?”

“Huh?”

"What did Mother look like?"

"She was little — much slighter than you and at least two inches shorter — with fair hair, and big blue eyes."

"Oh." She thought of Di's tall, stately mother with the brown hair carefully marcelled, and she suddenly knew that she didn't want a tall, stately mother after all! A little one with fair hair would be much nicer.

They were coming to the town, and June leaned forward, eagerly. The road swept down a hill, and around a curve to reach the town whose roofs shone below them in the valley, and June's heart leapt. Adventure! What lay just around that curve? The Golden Lady of the Prince's dreams? The end of the Knight's Quest? Or disappointment again?

"Shall I — shall I go with you?"

Paul shook his head. "I'd rather go alone, please, June. You don't mind amusing yourself in the village with Willy?"

"N-no."

"Go into a store and buy yourself some pretties. And meet me at the garage at twelve, sharp. Then we'll have lunch somewhere."

“ And, Dad — ”

“ Yes? ”

“ If it is — Mother — ”

“ Yes? ”

“ Nothing — only — Oh, if it is! ”

“ If it is — which I doubt, June — I’ll bring her along to lunch! ”

They drew up before a garage, and Willy eyed the man suspiciously. But in spite of Willy’s distrust they left Maryannelizabeth there, and after a few words of instruction to the mechanic the three of them went up the street together.

“ Here’s where I leave you,” said Paul, pausing at a corner. “ Need any more money? Take this, anyway.”

She noticed that the fingers which pushed the folded bill into her hand trembled a little, and the fact heightened her own excitement. Her father, calm, poised, cool before thousands who applauded him, was as nervous as a boy. She watched him stride up the street and suddenly understood why he hadn’t wanted her along. There were tears in her eyes, but she winked them away.

Taking a fresh grip on Willy, who was



squirming around to see what the villainous garage man was doing to Maryannelizabeth, she was reminded of something she could get while she had the chance — a collar and leash for him!

She got it, although Willy did not take kindly to it at first, and then they went along better. To be sure, Willy would suddenly remember the hateful thing and try to back out of the collar and try to chew through the leash, and unexpectedly pull June almost off her feet at the sudden sight of a saucy cat washing her face on a shady porch. But for the most part he took it philosophically. They were queer people, but they at least fed him and didn't tie cans to his tail.

He sniffed at the butcher's shop, but June — incomprehensible person! — didn't seem at all intrigued by the delicious smell of raw beefsteak or the sight of a juicy bone. Instead, she went into another store and bought some other things, and although he watched carefully, she didn't take a bite of a single thing she bought.

There wasn't much in the village. Even June had to admit that. It drowsed in the shade of the maple-trees, and seemed almost to

yawn. The mechanic at the garage tinkered half-heartedly with Maryannelizabeth's back teeth, and whistled sleepily. A bird twittered in a tree above them. Willy sighed. They were headed away from the butcher's shop. Life was very flat.

June looked at her watch. It still lacked half an hour to twelve o'clock. Well, there wasn't anything to see in the town, and the people in the shops were not disposed to talk, so she set out for the little square which was laid out, absurdly enough, with green fields not two squares away. There she settled herself comfortably and began to write — first her adventures of the night before in her little Foolish Adventure Book, and then, as it still lacked several minutes to twelve, and she was near enough to the garage, she dashed off some cards to Di and Cathie and Mary. She had just finished them when an unusually violent wriggle from Willy and an impetuous whine made her look up. Paul was coming down the street toward the garage, walking rather slowly, and by his side was a little person in a floppy gray hat.

June's heart stopped. He had said — if it

were her mother he would bring her back with him. And here he was with a woman — a slight, girlish figure, scarcely as high as his shoulder. And she was talking to him animatedly — Could it be — ?

She scrambled to her feet, her heart beating wildly and her knees shaking.

Paul looked up and saw her, and waved his hat. The woman looked at her, too. They both stopped.

June forced herself to walk sedately out of the little square, holding tight to Willy's leash with trembling hands. What should she say?

Willy hurled himself forward with a shrill yelp of joy, then circled back and around June's ankles. She pitched forward into her father's arms, and she looked over his arm at the woman's face, and her heart came up into her throat. Could that be her mother?

## CHAPTER VII

### MAGGIE, THE WASH-LADY'S DAUGHTER

She saw a pair of blue eyes, first, with heavily beaded eyelashes, and blackened eyebrows — and the eyes beneath their make-up were rather small and hard and cold. They regarded her with hostility, tinged with amusement. Her cheeks were glowing with the very best of brunette rouge, which, in the glare of the sunshine seemed incongruous with the rest of her complexion. Her lips were rather full, and made more so by heavy purple lipstick. Somehow, it was not the make-up itself which disgusted June. It was rather the cheapness which underlay it. There was a coarseness in the texture of the skin, in the curve of the lips, in the glance of the eyes, which told her that this woman was masquerading as a lady, and not the real thing. June had never seen any one just like her, but somehow she knew.

It took just a minute for June to make her



estimate, and her heart sank. Her father had said that if she were her mother he would bring her — and here she was with him. Then —

“My daughter, June, Miss LaFitte,” said Paul, coolly, and Miss LaFitte put out a large hand, languidly. “I’m afraid I must ask you to excuse us now,” went on Paul. “Our car is almost ready, and we must push on.”

“You could have luncheon with me,” suggested Miss LaFitte. “There is a rather fair tea-room —”

“Thanks, we can’t now.” They moved toward the garage where the man was putting the last touches to the car.

“Well, it’s been a pleasure to have met you,” said Miss LaFitte. “And if you do decide to go in with me, let me know and I’ll fix it up with a man I know. One o’ the profesh.”

“Thanks, Miss LaFitte. I shall.”

“And it has been so nice to have met your — er — *daughter*. And I’d like to see your show when it comes to town, Mr. Severne. If you run against Izzy Baumgartner give him my very best. And do come to see me again. Please!”

“Thanks.”

Miss LaFitte's eyebrows and eyelashes and eyes performed a few remarkable feats, but they were lost on Paul who was inspecting Maryannelizabeth's wheel and her exposed back teeth with interest.

"Good-bye," gurgled Miss LaFitte.

"Bye," said Paul, presumably to Maryannelizabeth.

June watched the dainty figure trip along the pavement, and then turned back to her father just in time to see him and the garage man exchange a solemn wink.

"She's come up in the woild," remarked the garageman. "When we went to school together she was plain Maggie McGinnis, an' her ma took in washin'. I ain't sayin' nothin' agin that. Lots o' good women's took in washin', y'understand. But sence she got into voddysville — talk about high-hat! Miss Marguerite *Lay* Fitte now, if yer please! — How about some gas? Fill 'er up? Right. Got a pretty fair car there, Mister. Can't beat the Henrys, can yer? — It ain't like me to talk about no woman, y'understand, but when one what yer've known all yer life gets so doggone high and snooty! She's got her good points,

though. She's a great little necker, an' she ain't pertickler, if there's nobody better."

June smiled, for he seemed to be talking to her, and she let him put Willy into the seat. She took the wheel herself.

"Miss *Lay* Fitte. She's a fit all right. Thank you, sir. Hope you have a pleasant trip. Good-bye, Miss."

The car glided off, leaving him standing by his tank, his hat in his hand, and a silly smile on his face. He was remembering his joke with satisfaction.

June stole a look at her father's face. It was turned away but the corner of his mouth was tight, and having difficulty holding in a smile.

"Where shall we stop to eat, Dad? I'm nearly starved."

"The next town," laughed Paul. "And the farther away the better."

Willy looked regretfully at the butcher shop, nosed June's packages, and sighed.

Maryannelizabeth ran sweetly, and purred contentedly. Her wheel was all right now, and the neuralgia had gone from her back teeth. The world was all happy.

June, though consumed with curiosity, de-

cided to hold her questions until they had found a place to eat. Both kept a close watch for an eating-house, and hailed the sign, "Chicken Dinner," with delight. They followed the arrow which pointed along the way, and came to another sign, and then another, and then the abode of the long-heralded chicken dinner loomed before them.

They drove through the whitewashed driveway, and gave Willy to a kindly waitress who took him into the kitchen, and then they went into the dining-room.

It had been a farmhouse and was now a tea-room, made into a combination Japanese tea-garden and conventional hotel, with a smattering of old colonial, Chinese, and the original farmhouse cropping through now and then.

"The League of Nations," laughed Paul, looking about him. "Let's hope their taste in cooking is better than their taste in decorating."

"The one kind of interior decorating doesn't advertise the other any too well," twinkled June. "However, we don't have to eat the decorations. And I'm so hungry, I don't care which country they follow in their food."

After the rosy-cheeked waitress had taken



their order, June and her father looked at each other. June's eyes were full of questions, and Paul seeing them laughed outright. He looked more like a boy returning from a mischievous escapade than a knight disappointed in his quest.

"Well?" he laughed.

"You said if it were Mother," she accused him, "that you would bring her along. What do you mean by giving me heart failure like that?"

"I didn't bring her," protested Paul. "She came. I couldn't get rid of her. Of course I knew the minute I saw her that she was not your mother. If I had talked to the garage-man first — but there *was* a little mystery about her, mostly concocted by her press agent, I suppose, to keep people from getting wise to her humble origin. As if people wouldn't know it the minute they laid eyes on her — not her wash-lady mother, but her cheapness which goes deeper than ancestry. I'll never forget the look on your face when Willy spilled you into my arms! You looked like a stricken deer."

"I felt like one. I thought she *was* Mother.

Oh, it was an awful moment! Tell me what happened."

He grinned wickedly, and waited until the waitress had served them.

"Well, I found the place without any trouble and she was waiting for me, all dolled up as if she thought I was going to take her to a garden party or something. She even wore the hat, and carried a basket of roses, explaining that she had just been gathering roses."

"In that rig?"

"Exactly. 'Gather ye roses, while ye may' and then *he* may. I was ready in case she shouldn't be Olive, and gave her a line about being in the neighborhood and stopping in to bring greetings from Billy Greer."

"Who's Billy Greer?"

"A manager I happen to know. A friend in the profesh, as she would say. I didn't tell him why I wanted to see her, or he would probably have told me. You know, I've hesitated to do that, June, because the press agents would get hold of it and work it for all it was worth. Some of it has leaked out — afterward. But I don't want a gang of reporters on my trail when I interview some one who may be Olive.

However, it might save time if I hadn't that streak of reserve. — Well, so then she insisted that I should stay for lunch. I told her I had my daughter with me and we had just left the car to be overhauled, and must push on. Then she said she would walk as far as the garage with me, for she wanted to meet you. Oh, she treated me like an old friend — wanted to take my arm."

"And when she saw me, she saw green," chuckled June.

"June, your uncanny faculties of observation make me suspicious of Miss Spencer's Select. Didn't she freeze, though? I didn't want to overplay my hand, but I did want her to get the idea that we *might* be father and daughter, but were undoubtedly not, and that three would not be exactly the ideal number."

"Dad! I wondered why you didn't notice her stressing of the word daughter. I was furious!"

"I think I did pretty well myself on the spur of the moment. But I couldn't stand any more of her. If there's one type of woman I detest, June, it's a cheap flirt.

"I knew in a moment that she had never

heard of me, and that she couldn't place me, but was pretending to know all about me. At last she took the plunge and asked me if I had a new act. I told her I had a few new selections (which is true) and she invited me to do a song and dance with her, saying that high-brow stuff doesn't go in vaudeville (which is also true). She even offered to teach me to dance if I couldn't already."

"*Dad!*"

"I had a good time stringing her along, and she still thinks I am a vaudeville actor, with a violin specialty."

"But I should think for the sake of your art — you'd be proud to let her know that you are an — an — artist." Her voice broke in a giggle. "Of course I can see why you didn't. You're not puffed up at all, are you? But she did deserve to be put in her place and be taught that there's a long way between a concert and a 'show.'" She thought a minute. "You know, Dad, she reminds me a little of Joyce, somehow."

"Ah, yes. Joyce. She is the Joyce type, only Joyce has some refinement back of her, and is a little less crude in her methods — or



will be when she attains the uncertain age of Miss McGinnis-*Lay-Fitte*."

"Oh, Dad! I didn't think men knew so much about girls. I wouldn't want you — or — or any one else to even think about me that way."

"Then don't give us a chance," laughed Paul. "Be sweet and — how does the quotation go? — 'Be good, dear child, and let who will be clever!' And then when the boys and men think of you they will think —"

"'Don't take her anywhere. She's a flat tire'."

Paul looked startled for an instant, and then he laughed. "Quotation from whom?" He pretended to be fierce. "Who called my che-ild a flat tire?"

"Oh, one of the boys. You see we couldn't have boys at school, so some of the girls used to sneak out and meet them at the movies or some place. One time they took me along."

"And you met your Prince Charming, I suppose?"

"No. They weren't nice boys at all. One of them tried to kiss me and I wouldn't let him. Why, I didn't want to! I'd never met him be-

fore! And so — that was why. He told the others that I was a flat tire.”

“And probably will remember you all the days of his life as the girl who wouldn’t.” He played with his knife a moment in silence, then, matter-of-factly: “June, I don’t think I’d go out with those girls against the rules again.”

“Oh, I never have! But — well — you see Di took me to the Yale-Harvard game last fall, and we met some nice boys. I mean *nice* ones, Dad. I liked them — one especially. But of course he can’t come to the school. Di saw one of them again. He took her to hear Madame Sergieff the night we all came to hear you. And on holidays — ”

“We do jump around on our holidays, don’t we? ”

“I didn’t mean that. I do like to spend them with you! If we only had a home! You see, all the other girls go — go — home, and their friends give parties for them. But then none of them have famous fathers to be proud of. Oh, I shouldn’t have told you any of this. Forget it, please! I do love you better than anything else in the world, and I’d give up everything for you! Really I would!”

“ Why didn't you tell me this before? ”

“ I didn't want to bother you. And you have enough to worry about — with your tragedy — ”

“ That tragedy is over — an old story — past and done with. But having to think of your meeting boys at movie lobbies — that would be the real tragedy, June. And it sha'n't happen to you. From now on, we'll stay through our holidays — the winter ones, anyway, and I'll arrange my engagements so that I can come to one place which will be our headquarters.”

June's heart leaped. A little white house with a blue door, and a brass knocker, and Willy rushing madly about the living-room — she could just see how he would slide on the rugs, chasing a kitten, perhaps, because he was so glad she had come home. Home!

“ We'll have the swellest suite in the best hotel in New York,” went on Paul, enthusiastically.

The chicken in June's plate suddenly became hard to manage and there was a lump in her throat which was not chicken but which was almost as hard to manage. In an instant she had them both under control.

“ You think of the best things, Dad,” she sighed.

And yet there was a warm feeling around her heart. She had discovered that her father, though blundering and misunderstanding so many things, was still a comrade of the finest type — the kind who would listen to confidences without either laughing or being unduly shocked. Imagine Di telling her mother — her aristocratic mother! — about meeting those boys at the Palace Theatre door. It would have permanently unwaved that worthy lady’s hair, and Di would probably have been removed from Miss Spencer’s Select, and the place thereof would know her no more.

Luncheon over, they secured Willy, and set forth again, along a twisting road which had now dried out and wound through a mist of golden dust. Surely around those curves lay adventure — nights of mother-of-pearl and silver, days of sapphire and emerald and gold, strung on a winding thread of road.



## CHAPTER VIII

“ THE ROAD’S A WINDING RIBBON FLUNG ”

It was all right to joke about Maggie McGinnis-*Lay*-Fitte, and, as June said, with sudden wit, “ laff it off,” but June was disappointed, just the same. It must be discouraging to Paul to know that he had chased another rainbow up a blind trail.

She thought about it as they spun through the golden summer days that followed, with Paul at the wheel and Willy curled up between them, dreaming violently, with little “ whiffs ” and kicks of his four feet.

They sped through villages with white-washed churches and bright orange garages, and eccentric “ hot-dog ” stands, and through open country where the fields lay like a cloth of gold where the wild mustard and buttercups grew, embroidered with clumps of daisies.

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The butterflies dipped above patches of white and purple clover, and the bees hummed their way, straight-winged toward loaded cherry-trees in hillside orchards, and along the edges of woodland meadows. Plummy grasses scattered abroad their fairy snuff — away off on a hill a willow stood poised like a dancer, against the blue curtain of sky, her long green draperies trailing behind her. Along the roadside, the raspberry canes made graceful cathedral arches under which the fairy folk could gather to worship their great god, Pan. Little streams ran along chuckling to themselves and whispering secrets to the ferns and weeds that bent low to catch them — secrets they had overheard from the trees which stood along their banks murmuring together, their boughs interlaced like the fingers of lovers.

On a particular July day, Maryannelizabeth took them through a covered bridge, which rather, in some mysterious manner seemed to swoop down upon them and gather them in. There was an exciting, low rumble like distant thunder. Sunbeams sifted in a golden dust through the cracks in the roof, and through the side walls were glimpses of jade green and

brown waters with pencilings of gold, and lacy rufflings of foam. Then they emerged into the sunshine again, passed a farmhouse, and climbed a hill.

There was a swing in the dooryard of the farmhouse, and June looked back to see if she could catch a glimpse of the people who lived there. It was neatly whitewashed and well kept — not just the kind of house she would have chosen, but evidently some one's home. June sighed suddenly.

The sun sank lower. Willy yawned and sat up. He looked at Paul's chin, and remembered that his attempt to lick it earlier in the day had not been appreciatively received, and he turned and licked June's instead.

"Willy's hungry," said June. "And so am I."

Paul looked at his watch. "We'll stop soon. I think there is a lake here somewhere. So shall we wait and camp on the shore, or would you rather stop here?"

"Oh, let's go on!"

"Right! It can't be far now."

Nor was it. Ten minutes later they stopped at a farm — which later proved to be a sum-

mer camp — and asked for the owner. He was a genial man, who looked intently at Paul while he talked to him.

“ Why, yes, you can camp down there. Follow this lane to the end, then strike off through the field to that clump of woods. There you’ll find a place just made for camping — a flat rock and an open space for your tent. Of course, I don’t need to tell you to look out for the fire. You can fish there, too, and if the old rowboat hasn’t too big a leak in it, you can use that.”

“ Thanks,” said Paul, and decided against paying for the privilege, for the owner looked too embarrassingly like a big business man on a holiday. “ That’s very nice of you.”

“ You can swim there, too, if you want to. In the field there’s a camp of gypsies, so — nail down everything, and chain the car to a tree. If you do miss anything, just go up to the camp and take it back. They’ll be more surprised than you will when you find it there, but they won’t stop you.

“ Er — You *are* Paul Severne, aren’t you? I thought so,” shaking hands heartily. “ I heard you every night you were at Millvale.



The wife likes your music because it makes her sad when she's feeling happy. These women! Name's Scott."

"My daughter, June, Mr. Scott. Glad you like my music. I'm always glad to hear people say that they do, because I'm afraid I'd keep on playing, anyway, and we might as well have everybody happy."

Mr. Scott laughed. "Your daughter play, too, does she?"

"She hasn't shown any signs of it yet," laughed Paul.

"Isn't it strange," mused June, as Mary-annelizabeth waddled along down the twisting lane, complaining about the roughness of the road, "that every one thinks I ought to want to play because you do!"

"I'm glad you have better sense than to try to do it, just because *I* do! If you wanted to play, professionally, you'd have every advantage I could give you. You know that."

"Do you mind because I don't?"

"Nonsense, child! I'm more glad than otherwise. You should do something to make yourself of use in the world — whether it is baking bread for the people to eat or providing

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music for their souls — but it's up to you to choose. And there are lots of ways which bring less heartbreak than professional art of any kind. — There's the lake.”

Through an opening in the trees they could see the shimmering expanse of water sparkling in the last rays of the sun, rippled by a slight breeze, and the winding lane brought them to the shore where a ferry crossed.

They struck across a field, Maryannelizabeth snorting indignantly, and Willy taking a lively interest in the weeds which brushed the side of the car, and sniffing the scent of the grassy meadow.

A woman in a bright red dress, with full skirt, heavily embroidered, stood in the tall grass and watched them come, and a little farther on the main camp of the gypsies came into view. Something which was cooking in a big iron pot sent out an intriguing odor and Willy whined and wriggled with eagerness. The gypsies, apparently, lived in the gaily painted wagons which stood about in a circle, for there were children playing on the steps, and a woman sat in the front of one of them patching a pair of ragged trousers.

“The Romany Camp,” said Paul. “They don’t seem any too friendly toward the Gorgio invaders, either.”

A woman sitting at the root of a big tree, looked up as they bumped past. She was a striking-looking woman, brown and wrinkled of skin, with burning black eyes, and stringy, coarse, gray hair, and dressed in a splendidly embroidered dress, with big gold earrings in her ears. She called out a few words in a foreign tongue, and a man came out of one of the wagons and peered at them curiously. He was a villainous-looking individual, with an air which was at once defiant and furtive.

“I hope we’ll not be too near them,” said June, rather nervously.

“I guess they won’t bother us,” Paul assured her.

But June was far from easy in her mind. Even when she found the camp site was some distance away, she was nervous.

“We’ll nail everything down, all right,” laughed Paul, “and you take Willy into the tent with you; we’d better get the tent up now. You gather some wood for the camp fire — will you, June, while I’m doing it?”

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“Sure,” responded June. “Er — I’ll take Willy, too. Come along, Willy.”

Willy leapt to the end of his leash and plunged like an insane thing, but June would not let him go. She hung to her end even though it hampered her considerably in getting wood and carrying it in. Paul laughed at her struggles.

“They won’t hurt you, June. Don’t be so silly.”

“Willy needs — exercise!” panted June, and stopped suddenly while Willy investigated a mysterious hole between the roots of a tree.

“Let him go. He won’t run away.”

“They might catch him and put him in their pot. They do eat dogs, you know. And it would be terrible if they invited us for lunch!”

Paul’s only reply was a laugh as he hammered in the stakes for the tent. Under his expert hands the tent arose like a mushroom growth, and by the time June had collected a reasonable supply of wood he was ready to make the fire.

It was pleasant sitting there on the rock, listening to the soft lap-lap of the lake water, and the murmur of the trees. A deep peace stole



over her as she looked out across the waters. Even the gypsies were a part of the open life and therefore friendly, and there was nothing to fear.

They found the boat, after they had eaten their supper and the fire had died out, and she and Paul boarded her. After a little coaxing Willy sat between them. He was not enthusiastic, but he made the best of it.

Mr. Scott's house stood near the water's edge at the lower end of the lake, and Paul decided to serenade him from the water when the moon came up. So he held his precious violin in its damp-proof case across his knees.

It was growing dusk, the apple-green afterglow of sunset and the hyacinth blue of twilight were just mingling, and the waters of the lake were jeweled with flakes of jade and lapis. Paul offered to take the oars, but June refused, saying he should keep his hands in condition, and not run the risk of splashing his instrument. She liked to row, she said, and needed the exercise.

They slipped along silently, except for the soft dip of the oars, dreaming in the romantic light. The upper part of the lake was

bordered with sloping green fields, where willows made a green mist and frogs began to tune up for their evening concert. Up on the hillside they could see the gypsy camp, and hear the faint twanging of a guitar. On another hill a dog barked, and a cock crowed, and from the other end of the lake came an answering crow, almost like an echo, with an elfin tang to it. It was easy to understand why the mountain countries like Scotland and Ireland and Switzerland had their fascinating tales of elves and gnomes and fays, when echoes wandered over the surface of quiet waters with such eerie tones.

The opposite shore of the lake was rocky and steep, and June kept farther away from the bank out of respect to possible submerged rocks. At one point a road came down to the shore, and there a rude landing was built, with a rowboat and a flat scow tied to it. That was the ferry, no doubt, and the scow was used to transport light cars which wished to make the short cut. Near by, the lights of the ferryman's house twinkled, and on a post at the landing was a red lantern which served the double purpose of marking the end of the road

on a dark night, and serving as a guide to the ferry-man in crossing on a moonless night; and on a nail driven into the post there was a horn for summoning the ferry-man if he were not within sight, or to summon the Scotts when the mail-man left mail in their box on a tree near by.

At the splash of June's oars, the bearded face of the ferry-man appeared at the window of his house, together with a chubby, rosy face, framed in soft curls — the face of his little granddaughter. They waved to June, and June raised a dripping oar in salute.

"It reminds me of one of those little weather-houses," she said. "You know the kind, with a woman and a man on a stile which swings back and forth according to the weather."

Paul laughed. "It does look interesting perched up there on the water's edge. It hasn't been painted, you see. That's what gives it that rustic look."

June took in her oars and they floated gently past the rocks and pine-trees of the shore, while the purple wings of evening folded them round. Paul took out his violin and tuned it softly. Then he began to play — barcarolles, and waltzes, and dreamy selections, and as always

while her father played, June's world was filled with lovely ladies in formal gardens, ladies in flowing white robes who seemed to float on marble paths beneath hedges of cypress trees which stood out blackly against a moonlit sky. She saw scudding clouds behind towers and battlements and mediaeval turrets. And through it all there was a throbbing as of passionate longing, a poignant, yearning tragedy too deep for tears, which made her think of Paolo and Francesca, of Petrarch and Laura, of Dante and Beatrice, of Romeo and Juliet, personifications of human love and loss.

Others recognized the same quality in her father's music and spoke of him as the “violinist with the heartbreak in his music.” And now June was beginning to understand. He would never be able to tell in words the tragedy of his life. He had built a wall of silence and reserve around that part of his heart. But his soul betrayed him in his playing. And there is no instrument which responds more readily to the changing moods of the artist than the violin, nor is there any shade of human emotion which can not be caught on those four strings.



The house where the Scotts lived was unlighted, but there was a flash of white on the lawn near a rustic summer-house, and as June rowed in toward shore and Paul's music sounded louder, several figures came out from the summer house and wandered down toward the water's edge.

June hoped they enjoyed it as much as she did. She was sorry when her father wanted to go back to camp, and wished that she could spend the night lazily drifting in the moonlight.

But when she reached their camp she realized that she was tired, after all. She went right to the tent, taking Willy with her, and lay for a while looking out at the rocks over which the moonlight cast mantillas of fine lace shadows, and listening to the lap-lapping of the water.

Then, very softly, she heard her father playing again, and, with a tone that was almost human, his violin sobbed Massenet's *Élégie*:

“ Et c'est en vain que revient le printemps !  
Oui, sans retour avec toi le gai soleil,  
Les jours riants sont partis ! ”

Poor Dad!

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A bright star peeped into her tent — sparkling like gypsy eyes — the waves made low, crooning noises — the moon rode high like a pirate ship and scattered golden ducats on the hammered-brass tray of the lake —

## CHAPTER IX

### ROMANY GOLD

“R-r-r-r-r! Wuff! Wuff!”

June started up in sudden fright. Willy stood at the tent flap, with his nose outside, and he was barking energetically. The night rattled with his clamor. And there was an unfamiliar vicious note in his voice. When he paused to take breath, the night seemed still, but there was an undercurrent of mystery and terror in it.

“Willy!” she breathed, cautiously.

Willy looked around and remarked, “Wuff,” conversationally, then put his nose outside again.

“Willy! Come here!”

But Willy remained in the tent flap. June listened intently. Save for the beating of her own heart and the ominous growling deep in Willy’s throat, everything was calm. The

trees sighed — a branch brushed the wall of the tent — a loon mourned somewhere in the moonlight. She lay back and sighed. Willy had no doubt been dreaming.

In an instant she sprang up. A footstep sounded just outside the tent, and she somehow felt the presence of some one there. Was it one of the gypsies? They would take anything that was not nailed down, Mr. Scott had said —

But on top of her terror came overwhelming relief. She heard a familiar voice in guarded whisper: “Lie down, Willy.”

“That you, Dad?”

“Yes. Did Willy wake you, June? Too bad. Go to sleep again.”

“I thought I heard something.”

“Chipmunk, probably. Willy’s a chipmunk hound, evidently. Good night, Kid.”

Before going he bestowed a pat on Willy’s nose and whispered a very low “Good dog,” which made Willy wag his tail vigorously.

“Now I hope you’re satisfied,” said June, as she prepared to finish her interrupted sleep.

But Willy was not particularly satisfied. He dropped to the tent floor, to be sure, but



his forepaws with his nose between them were outside the tent flap, and for a long while his restless brown eyes peered through the moonlight and his ears twitched at every one of the subdued night sounds. He would not have barked at Paul, and Paul knew it, and down in his doggy heart Willy knew that Paul knew some one had been abroad.

It was there that Paul found him in the morning, asleep, with his nose between his paws, half outside the tent.

June was awakened by the stuttering of a motor-boat, and the sound of voices, one of them her father's. Willy cocked an ear, sniffed, and uttered a joyous yelp. June sprang up and dressed but by the time she had reached the tent flap the visitors were gone.

Paul stood on a rock looking after the retreating motor-boat. He turned and smiled at her. "The Scotts," he explained. "They have saved us the labor of cooking our breakfast by inviting us up to the house."

"Oh!" cried June. "Isn't that lovely? I'm so glad I brought a dress! Just a minute and I'll be with you!"

She dove headlong into the tent again and

fumbled in her suitcase. Willy dashed madly in and enthusiastically began to help her, but was sternly repressed. He went off and sat down with his head on one side, hoping she would divide the bone or whatever she had buried.

Paul said, afterward, that it took less than a minute to transform the slim boyish vagabond into a delightful young lady in a blue georgette dress (which was warranted to stand packing and repacking without needing pressing each time). She fastened the leash to Willy's collar, and they set off through the woods by the fern-edged path which led to the Scott bungalow. It was a delightful path, cool and moist, with dancing sunlight through the trees, and delightful holes under roots which were especially intriguing to Willy, eager to investigate every one.

"I wonder what Willy thinks he'll find in these holes?" panted June, yanking him away from one.

"He'll find a skunk in one," prophesied Paul, darkly.

"I think he must be some kind of a hunting dog, don't you?"

“ Perhaps — a snake terrier or something.”

They finally reached the Scott bungalow without losing Willy down a hole, and found Mr. and Mrs. Scott awaiting them on the rustic porch. They were ushered into the dining-room without ceremony. Even Willy was allowed to sit under the table after Mrs. Scott had patted him and he had passed judgment on her and her husband and cast a tolerant eye toward the disdainful cat perched on the window-sill.

That breakfast was one of the outstanding events of June's life. Right then and there she hoped to grow into a person like Mrs. Scott. To begin with, they talked music, and then the conversation drifted to other things as they dallied over their bacon and eggs and delicious hot rolls and fragrant coffee. A rich negro voice hummed softly in the kitchen and made a pleasant undertone to their thoughts. And June found herself taking part in the conversation, largely through the skilful efforts of Mrs. Scott, who steered away from technicalities.

After breakfast, Mrs. Scott took June out into the garden to see the roses, and before she

knew it, June was telling her a little of her longings for a home — a real home, with a rose garden and a cat in the window. And while Mrs. Scott listened a wistful light came into her own eyes.

“ You haven’t a mother, then? ” she asked softly.

June shook her head.

“ And I have no daughter. She would have been just about your age — I wonder whether it is better to have a thing and lose it, or never to have it at all? ”

She stood for a moment looking at the dew-drenched larkspurs with eyes just as blue and just as wet, then she shrugged her shoulders and smiled mistily.

They came upon the men again, sitting on the porch which overlooked the lake. The water ruffled in the morning breeze and reflected glints of amethyst and lapis lazuli with touches of fire on the tips of the waves. The men seemed very much at ease.

Mrs. Scott sighed. “ The lake is never twice the same, is it, John? ”

Mr. Scott made room for her on the bench, but she shook her head. “ I think not right



now, John. If you don't mind, Mr. Severne, I should like to take June to see the gypsies. She'd like it, I know."

"Oh, I would," breathed June, and she would have said it in just that awed tone if the older woman had proposed a trip to the moon.

They all laughed.

"You needn't think you're going to get away to-day," Mrs. Scott laughed back over her shoulder. "Not before lunch, anyway, because there'll be fried chicken, Southern style, with waffles for luncheon, and you must stay for those!" She brought a big, floppy hat for June as a protection against the sun in the open meadow and June yanked Willy away from a knot-hole and they started. "When we come back," Mrs. Scott prophesied, "we'll find John and your father sitting on that big rock under the dining-room window fishing. I don't know whether your father likes to fish or not, but I know John, and no man living can help fishing off that rock while John's around! — I'd call your dog away from that hole if I were you, June."

June pounced upon Willy and fastened the

leash to his collar again, giving him a little slap which made him flatten his ears and look abused.

“A skunk lives in that hole — oh, a tame one! Last summer I was mortified to death. We had guests — some relatives of John’s who have never cared particularly for me — and of course we tried to make everything as nice as we could for them because they don’t go in for the rough kind of camp life you folks and John and I can endure. They were pretty well disgusted, anyway, at some of the make-shifts which we would call fun. And in the midst of it, in walked the skunk, straight through the dining-room, carrying a well-ripened fish-head. First, Aunt Ethel thought it was a cat, but when it dawned on her what it was she sat petrified with horror, and so did Uncle Amos. John looked ready to explode, and I was really worrying more for fear he would laugh than from fear of any *faux pas* the skunk might make. He pushed the door open and went out. In a little while he was back again with a cantaloupe shell. Aunt Ethel’s nose turned up an extra degree, and her hair fairly bristled. So, although a

skunk is a perfect gentleman when he is left alone, I wouldn't answer for him if Willy frightened him."

Almost before she knew it June was telling Mrs. Scott about her meeting with Willy and her reason for naming him. Mrs. Scott laughed girlishly at the recital.

It was a joy to walk through the field with Mrs. Scott. She knew every weed and shrub and called it by name. And she sorted out the bird-calls which came from all sides near by and far away. She knew about the gypsies, too.

"Gypsies are interesting, aren't they?" said June. "It must be an interesting life."

Mrs. Scott made a slight grimace. "Horror! They're a clannish sort of people. We *Gorgios* very seldom are accepted as their friends — never into their clan by marriage or adoption. I very much doubt the tales of kidnappings of children from Gorgio homes. However, they'll steal anything else, so I suppose they wouldn't draw the line at a child. They really think it an evidence of smartness to cheat a person in a deal. You have to be shrewd to deal with them, and if they are shrewder, they

think they have won, just as you win by out-witting your opponent in a game."

"They're Hungarians, aren't they, or Roumanians, or something?"

"Who knows? The early people in Europe thought they were Egyptians, and that is why they called them gypsies. But a study of their language seems to connect them with India. It may well be. They have been nomads for centuries, keeping to themselves and preserving their racial language and customs, and moving, always moving restlessly. There's a fortune-teller here, too. Shall we see her — not believing what she says, of course — ?"

June's eyes sparkled an answer.

They had reached the encampment, and in the excitement and bustle of the morning's activity, there seemed an undercurrent of tension. Willy sniffed and then barked, and the hair along his back bristled, and a ruff stood up around his neck. He growled deep down in his throat.

"Hush, Willy," commanded June and tucked him under her arm, from which place he yapped and snarled menacingly.

A man looked up from his work of polishing



a bit of harness and called something over his shoulder. The curtains of one of the wagons parted, and a girl put her head through.

She was a pretty girl, not more than June's age, perhaps, but with a much older air, a sophisticated self-confidence, a knowledge of her own beauty, a sense of maturity.

"We tell fortunes?" she invited. "We tell the young Miss of her lovers — Yes?"

"In a moment," smiled Mrs. Scott. She passed on to another tent where a woman was making baskets which were immediately displayed and offered for sale. They chose instead a strip of embroidery, and although a young matron insisted that it was for her newest baby and not for sale, she finally put a price upon it and accepted half of it, gratefully, after a little bickering.

"I feel as though I had robbed her," whispered June.

"Nonsense," laughed Mrs. Scott. "She's been making that in my presence ever since she's been here, and displaying it for the sole purpose of selling it to me."

The young matron pocketed the money somewhere in her voluminous skirts and laughed, as

she nodded an assent. "Madame drives a hard bargain," she commented, approvingly.

Three grimy children heard Mrs. Scott's voice and tumbled out of the wagon. Mrs. Scott smiled upon them and produced chocolate which they hailed with delight.

"Look," whispered June, pointing to the bent old figure they had seen the day before. "Such a life is hard on old people like that. She looks as if she had been crying, doesn't she?"

"Perhaps. And it may be a scheme to wring money from us. Come, let's unveil the future! Want me to come in with you?"

June hesitated at the steps of the fortune-teller's van. "Yes," she said, laughing at her own nervousness. "I've never had my fortune told before."

Mrs. Scott smiled.

There was a little preliminary crossing of a hard young palm with silver money and a few strange noises, which, combined with the dim light inside the van and the unfamiliar surroundings, created an atmosphere of mystery.

"Missy follows the road," began the gypsy in a pleasantly deep, clear voice. "She follows

the lure of happiness over the hills. And the world is wide. Missy is young. She will have lovers. I see them — one, two, three — fair, are two, and dark the third. And her children shall be dark with amber eyes. Three children there will be or — is it — four? ” There was more along the same strain. Then the girl asked Mrs. Scott if she would like her fortune told. Mrs. Scott shook her head, smilingly, in negation.

June was obviously thrilled, as they walked back across the fields. Mrs. Scott laughed at her, tenderly.

“ Thinking of the three lovers? ” she asked, and then put an arm around her and pressed her close.

“ Oh, it was a great adventure! ” June sighed, ecstatically. “ I wonder where I shall meet them? ”

“ Who knows? ” laughed Mrs. Scott. “ There are our men! I told you they would be fishing from the rock! ”

As she prophesied, too, June and Paul did not get away from their hospitable camp until late in the evening.

As June and her father walked home along

the twisty path in the moonlight, she told him of her visit to the fortune-teller's van.

“Pooh!” he scoffed. “What did she tell you that you don't know already?”

“Lots of things!” asserted June, stoutly.

“The young football enthusiast, for instance, was one of the fair ones — ?”

She rubbed her cheek against his arm. “Now you're making fun of me.”

Paul stiffened suddenly. The gesture, which June had never used before, and the tone of her voice coming out of the shadows, reminded him poignantly of Olive. Just so Olive had rubbed her cheek against his rough tweed coat-sleeve, and just so her voice had sounded shaken with a laugh out of the shadows. Something caught in his throat.

“Kid,” he said, huskily, “keep your dreams and your faith in them, no matter what happens. It is better to sit in the midst of a ruin with dreams, than to sit in splendor a blasé cynic.”

“Wuff!” remarked Willy.

“Oh!” said June, for in the clearing before their tent stood a bent figure — the old gypsy woman whom they had seen the day before.



She looked around at them as they came out into the full flood of moonlight, and she made an uncertain gesture as if to go.

“Wait a moment,” said Paul, kindly. “Did you want to see us?”

“I wandered here,” she said, hesitatingly, as if English came hard to her tongue. “I am — sorry — ”

“You’re in trouble,” said June, impulsively. “Oh, I *know* you are!”

At the touch of the young arms about her in sympathy, the old woman collapsed. She sat down on a rock and wailed, swaying back and forth.

“What has happened?” begged June. “Oh, do tell me!”

“My money,” said the old woman, in a dry whisper. “All my gold, my lovely, beautiful gold! Handfuls! In a box — a tin box — Gone!”

“But who would take it?” asked June.

She shook her head, helplessly. “I not know. I come — I was led — the money is here.”

“No, no!” cried June.

The old woman suddenly stretched out claw-

like hands and her black eyes gleamed. "Here, I tell you. Give it to me! Give me my gold!"

"That's enough," said Paul, sternly. "If you've lost your gold, which I doubt, you'll not find it here. Be off with you!"

"I would not hurt the young missy," she whined. "No. I do not say she took it — But — it is here. I see — I see — a man — bring the box — hiding it — I hear a dog bark. Ha! Your dog!"

"Gr-r-r-r," said Willy, half-heartedly.

"I see another man come out of — out of — some place. He is too late. He does not know. He stops and speaks to the dog."

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Paul. "Here, take this and go away. Don't come back, understand? I don't want to be annoyed while we are here. Last night was enough — Tell the men of your camp that I am armed and will make it hot for the first one I catch prowling around here! It isn't gold, but it's as good. Now go!"

"Sir — sir! I know. Ah, doesn't your heart tell you — the heart that is broken — that lets its music through — "

“Come back in the morning,” said Paul, uncomfortably but still sternly.

The old woman rose to go, and hobbled away a few steps. “My gold!” she sobbed. “My beautiful, beautiful gold!”

“Oh, Dad,” said June, reproachfully. “How could you? She is so old — and to be robbed.”

“Pshaw! Robbed!” He sat down at the root of a tree. “You’d better take Willy into the tent again, June. I’m going to bunk out here. Call Willy away from that hole. What has he got, anyway?”

“Willy!” Willy’s only response was a growl and a sniffing of the embers of the old camp fire. June picked him up and carried him inside, and there was a dull ache in her heart, an ache of pity for the old woman, and of disappointment in her father’s sympathy.

## CHAPTER X

### PUCK

June lay awake for a long time that night, thinking over the events of the day, and smiling to herself as she recalled the gypsy's prophecy, and as she remembered Mrs. Scott's companionship, frowning a little as she thought of the poor old woman who had lost her gold. It threw a new light on her father's personality, and she tried to say loyally that she knew he was right, but just the same she wondered if he had not been a little too harsh. Perhaps the gypsy was merely taking advantage of June's youth and sympathy and hoping to get something by making a scene. It was nice to know that her father would protect her against any unpleasantness. But still —

So there had been a prowler about their camp the night before! It had not all been imagination on Willy's part. Good old Willy! She



turned, restlessly, and Willy whimpered in his sleep.

Then suddenly it was morning, and the sunshine streamed through the chinks in the tent flap, and the water cast dancing reflections on the tent walls. It was early, and although Paul wanted to get away that day, there would be time for one last swim in that marvelous lake.

June found Paul already in the water, and lost no time in following. Willy ran along the bank, barking excitedly, almost frantic when June disappeared for an instant. She threw sticks for him and tempted him into the water, and although he obeyed and went in, it was under pressure and he stayed with her, looking reproachfully at her and seemingly wondering what on earth she was doing in that nasty wet stuff. It was too shallow near the shore, and too rocky, to permit diving, but farther out it was ideal for swimming and June and her father and Willy, when he caught the spirit of the thing, had great sport.

When they came out, Willy promptly shook himself, then rolled over and over in the moss and ferns. He was left to his own devices more or less while Paul found wood for the fire, and

June dressed, and packed the rest of her things into her suitcase. When she emerged from the tent, Paul was still away although his bathing suit, spread out on a rock in the sun, was beginning to look fuzzy. Willy was busily engaged in digging a hole in the embers of the old camp fire.

“Willy!” cried June.

Willy growled. He stopped his digging for a moment and looked at her as if he would say he knew his own business, and then went on digging with paws and nose, flinging back the loose earth in a shower.

“Willy!” commanded June. “You’re making yourself all dirty again! Dad,” as Paul emerged, dragging a branch of a tree. “Dad, just look at Willy!”

Paul looked and laughed, for the dog did look comical with the smudge of wet clay on his nose, and a sort of desperately earnest expression on his face.

“G’way, Willy,” he said, shoving him aside. “No woodchuck in there! You made that hole yourself!”

But Willy resisted, strenuously, and sniffed the earth and growled menacingly.

Paul regarded him thoughtfully. "June, animals sometimes have more common sense than we give them credit for. Let's see what he finds."

"Doesn't that clay look loose for a new hole?" asked June, suddenly.

Paul flashed her a look. "I was thinking that myself." He went to the car and returned with a pair of spoons. "Let's help."

Willy accepted their help as a matter of course and for a few moments two spoons and two forefeet and a nose busily shoveled out earth.

"This has been tampered with," said Paul. "Maybe —" A ringing sound interrupted him.

"Oo! Dad! I hit something then!" She hit it again and it gave out a tinny ring. "The gypsy treasure!"

In a trice it lay uncovered. It was a long tin box, battered and worn and bent, the warped lid tied down with a piece of knotted jute string.

June held it, then her hands trembled. "Do — do — you suppose it is the gold or — ?"

Paul laughed at her. "What else could it be, June?"

Nevertheless, he took the box and untied the string, shielding the contents from her sight.

It was gold. Hundreds of pieces — a fortune indeed. There were old-fashioned gold dollars, later pieces of two and a half and five and ten dollar denominations.

"Do you suppose it was that old woman's, Dad? Or do you think she buried it here and we surprised her when she came back for it?"

"No. It was stolen from her and buried. Clever of him, wasn't it, to bury it where we had made our camp fire, and then rake the embers over it?"

"Let's see if we can find her, shall we?"

"You go, and I'll make the fire and have breakfast for you. Don't stay too long, and take Willy."

Willy was disgusted that there were no bones in the hole, but he accepted the situation philosophically. He was learning that people sometimes buried things in boxes, but they were seldom bones. People were very hard to understand.

June found the old woman sitting discon-



solately at the root of a tree on the outskirts of the camp. She looked at June and her black eyes snapped.

"You have found it," she said, calmly.

June nodded.

"It is in an old tin box," went on the old woman. "There are a hundred dollar pieces, some of them as old as 1870, and some larger pieces. They are wrapped in a piece of embroidery with a pomegranate design worked in crimson silk and thread of gold."

June handed over the box. "Better count them and see that they are all there. Perhaps the thief took a few."

"They are all there," stated the old woman, without lifting the lid. "He did not take any. And you would not. — And he was my son. Ah, me. Just a few years and he would have them anyway. But that is life, my child — greed, unhappiness." She drew herself up with sudden dignity. "Sit down by me, my child, and I will tell you your fortune."

"One of the girls told me yesterday," ventured June, awed by the piercing scrutiny of the uncanny black eyes.

"Pah!" the withered lips spat her disgust

and the black eyes blazed more fiercely than ever. “She! She knows nothing. I — I — can tell fortunes. Listen. I will tell you. Girl with the amber eyes — you follow the twisting road, mile upon mile. You see more than trees and rocks and hills. Your eyes look into the past, they pierce the veil of the future. Years ago — I see — a pointed tower — a steep, winding street — flames — hurry and madness — willows and moonlight and a canal — and loss, loss to the soul, to the heart of *him*. I see people at his feet as he plays — I see you going forward with the song of a bird in your heart — the song of a bird at nesting time — the thrill of a pigeon that is homing. I see a village with two twisted willows at the side of a bridge — I see a youth, tall and stalwart, with dark hair and blue eyes to match your amber ones — and at the end of the curving road — at a twist where you can pause while the road winds on at the other side, I see your heart’s desire — ”

“My mother?” breathed June.

“The desire of your heart — the end of the quest — ” She rose stiffly. “Tell — *him*. If he scoffs say one word to him — ‘Puck.’

“ Here ” — She took a hoop of gold from her left ear lobe and held it out in her gnarled brown hand. “ Take it. Do not refuse a gift, Gorgio girl! Take it, and if you are in need, seek the nearest of my people and show this. They will honor it, for I am not quite what I seem. Even royalty grows old, but there is still respect, save from the queen’s own children. Ah, well.”

June felt herself dismissed, and there was something in the bearing of the bent old figure which made the claim of royalty not so very odd after all. She went slowly back to the clearing, pondering over the occurrence.

“ I feel as if I had stepped into a fairy tale,” she laughed as she began the breakfast her father had ready for her. And then she went on to tell him about it.

“ She was so glad to have it back again. She gave me an earring — and I wouldn’t have been a bit surprised if she had turned into a fairy or something. She did say that if I ever get into trouble to go to the nearest gypsy caravan and they would recognize a gift from their queen — just like the mediaeval kings did, you know, when they sent messengers with their personal signet ring.”





“TAKE IT. DO NOT REFUSE A GIFT.”—*Page 142.*





Paul saw her eyes wide with dreams, and her lips quivering with earnestness, and he forebore to laugh; only his eyes twinkled.

“ And she told my fortune, Dad.”

“ How did it compare with yesterday’s? ”

“ It was rather different — but truer.”

“ Did she tell you about the football fan with the fair hair? ”

“ No. She told me things only *I* know and — and — she told me about our quest and the fire in the towered house in the town in France — and — and — other things — beautiful things — ”

Paul looked thoughtful. “ Funny she should have known about that French town, though, June.”

“ She said — ” June’s eyes glowed with a mystic awe. “ She said ‘flames — hurry and madness — willows and moonlight and a canal — and loss, loss to the soul, to the heart of *him*!’ ”

Paul shrugged his shoulders. “ She knew it because you did. If *you* had not had it in your mind, she could not have gotten it out. It’s all a humbug, June. It isn’t possible to read the future. Thank heaven it isn’t! If I

could have seen into the future fifteen years ago, I should have lost my mind!"

June nodded. "She said you would scoff, and if you did I was to say one word to you — 'Puck'."

"*What?*"

Willy ran away three paces, then came back, sheepishly, and eyed Paul nervously.

Paul's eyes were wide and incredulous, and his nostrils were pinched in and white. "She said — *what?* She couldn't have! I tell you, June, no one knew — no one!"

June looked startled, too. "What does it mean?" she faltered.

Paul started off as if he would rush headlong into the gypsy camp, then swung around and walked back rapidly, and Willy got out of his way.

"It was your mother's nickname for me — her private name never used even before you! How could she have gotten hold of it? I tell you no one knew!"

"Do we have to explain it?" ventured June. "Can't we — maybe — just say we don't understand, but perhaps it is true — and a — a clue to Mother?"

He strode toward the tent. "You finish your breakfast, June, and we'll get started as soon as we can. I want to see that gypsy and talk to her about it. If I were you, I'd keep that earring in a safe place — not that I believe she is a queen or anything, but they're a clannish people and the very fact that you have a gift from her would give you a claim on any other if you should need help."

"I would keep it for sentiment, anyway," said June and looked at it as it lay in the palm of her hand. She decided that the sight of it would recall to her the burning eyes of the old gypsy and the memory of the words: "The song of a bird in your heart — the song of a bird at nesting time — the thrill of a pigeon that is homing. . . . And at the end of the curving road — I see your heart's desire."

By the time she was through breakfast the tent had been struck and packed into the back of Maryannelizabeth, and June helped Paul to pick up the slight litter of their two nights' camping. Willy ran around in circles barking, stopping now and then to peer into holes, but generally too excited to pause long. He had soon learned what such preparations meant,



and he was always eager to take to the road again to roam in pastures new where there were unexplored holes and possibly buried bones.

They were off again, through the gold-stippled woods, and out into the field where the gypsies were encamped. There in the open field, knee deep among the feathery grasses, stood the gypsy queen, a withered, warped, yet somehow truly regal figure. She shaded her eyes with her hand, but made no move to signal them, nor did she move when Paul stopped the car close to her and climbed out over the wheel.

He approached her, hat in hand. "I want to tell you how sorry I am for the way I treated you last night in camp," he said, directly and honestly.

The black eyes lighted with pleasure. "It is not always that we know the right thing," she said, simply. "It is not always that we have the courage to say we have been wrong."

"I appreciate your gift to my daughter," he went on — "Especially —"

She bent her head slightly. "Your daughter's heart is on the highway. There was something else you would say?"

“ Yes. How did you know about — Puck? ”

The wrinkles at the corner of her eyes deepened. “ How? I do not know. It is given to me to know things, not to know how I know them.”

“ Did you know her? Have you seen her? Where is she? ”

“ I do not know her. I have not seen her. But you will find her at the curve of a road when you come to the end of the quest.”

“ This summer? ”

“ Who knows? ”

“ You can add another gold piece if you will tell,” he hinted.

She spread out her hands. “ One finds happiness at the end of the quest. Who knows when a quest ends? ”

“ I shall succeed, then? Is she alive? ” He looked deep into the inscrutable eyes, which he vaguely felt were mocking him. “ Is the end of the quest the grave? ”

“ Who knows? And success — success is after all but relative. Have you, then, but one quest to be crowned with success? Fortunate youth.”

He paused. "Who has?" he admitted, for suddenly he knew that his search for his lost wife was not the only thing in his life. His violin and the people who loved his music — June meeting boys in lobbies of movie theatres — the black eyes watched him knowingly. He bowed.

"I hope our trails will cross again, somewhere along the road."

He sprang into the car again and started it. June looked back as they reached the lane, and the queen still stood in the tall grass, like a gigantic poppy with her wide-spreading crimson skirt and crimson headdress, and she was looking after them under a shading hand.

## CHAPTER XI

### CUCKOO

Right where the lane joined the highway, Mr. and Mrs. Scott were waiting to speed the vagabonds on their way. June was especially glad to see Mrs. Scott, and insisted upon her father tarrying long enough so that she might tell them all the details of the recovery of the treasure. The Scotts listened delightedly.

Then, while Mr. Scott was interested in an ingenious home-made affair which Paul had put upon his car, and was laughing at Paul's explanation of it, and the make-up of it, June found time to tell Mrs. Scott of the prophecy in all its beauty. The day before, June had told her a little of the object of their quest, and so Mrs. Scott was interested in the gypsy's knowledge.

"They are strange people," she repeated.



"It is hard to know just how much of their fortune-telling is some strange gift and how much of it is pure trickery. But I hope it comes out well, and my little Lady-bird will find a cozy nest by a curve in the road at the journey's end. Write to me, and come to see me in town."

"Oh, I shall," promised June.

They parted at last, and June waved to them as long as she could see them.

"Aren't they lovely people?" she sighed.

"She used to have a girl like me, she said."

"She's fond of you, June."

"I know. I could feel it. — Dad?"

"What?"

"You don't suppose — suppose — she's Mother, do you?"

"Heavens, no!"

"You're sure?"

"Positive! Don't you suppose I'd know her if — when I see her again?"

"But if she had been — married again — and — What would you do?"

"You have too lively an imagination for me, June. I don't know. But don't worry your head about it. If we find she is married again

— then will be time enough to worry, and decide what to do.”

“ You sound as if you expect to see her,” said June, impishly. “ In spite of what you said about gypsy fortunes.”

“ I have always expected to find her again,” he said quietly. “ Willy, you *must* not lick my chin! It’s going to be an awfully hot day, June. Let’s plan for lunch at a farmhouse or a tea-room instead of making a fire.”

“ Suits me,” agreed June.

They found a tea-room on the outskirts of a pretty village. The cook in the kitchen welcomed Willy literally with open arms and fed him generously, while his mistress and master were treated quite as regally in the tea-room itself.

The room was cool, and tastefully furnished, and the food was good. There was not only the inevitable chicken dinner but there were other good things as well. And there was a pleasant girl for a waitress, whom they afterward found to be one of the proprietors.

“ It’s an unusually exciting day for Cloverdale,” volunteered the girl.

“ Why? ” asked Paul, noting her high color

and sparkling eyes and general air of repressing something with an effort.

“Right up on the hill — you’ll see the towers and walls when you go past —, there’s an insane asylum. One of the inmates escaped this morning and the whole village is out hunting for him.” She took a folded paper out of the pocket of her apron. It was a small, roughly printed handbill. “The printing shop ran these off in a hurry, and they’re posted up already. They describe him.”

June looked at it with interest tinged with pity. “A young man,” she murmured. “Dark hair and blue eyes, medium height, cultured, pleasant voice, attractive personality. Believes himself to be Shakespeare and quotes poetry. Harmless.”

“He sounds more attractive than some people who are at large,” said Paul, with a grin.

“Some of them are,” nodded the girl. “Quite a number are just eccentric and put there because their families are embarrassed by their queer ways. One got loose once before,” she went on with a reminiscent smile. “We had just come here, and we were worried to death. We thought he would come here and

do something terrible. Sure enough, he did come here, and he chopped our wood and made our fires and did odd jobs, and we fed him for a week until some one recognized him. Every time we looked at that ax for weeks afterward it gave us cold shivers. And, yet, come to think of it, he wasn't so violent as some of the customers who come in here and think they're perfectly sane. Some of the patients up there, who are just there for treatment for a while, come into the tea-room, with a 'companion,' and you'd never know anything was wrong. The violent ones, and the very much unbalanced ones, of course, they keep under close guard, and they are never allowed outside the grounds. We went through the place. It's really very interesting, and not all gruesome nor unpleasant!"

"It seems horrible, though," shuddered June. "I'd be scared to death if I met this man."

"I shouldn't," smiled the girl. "There's a fifty-dollar reward for him, and *I* could use it very nicely. I'd rather return an escaped lunatic than an escaped convict, because the lunatic isn't being punished. He's just sick,



while a convict is being returned to degradation and perhaps to death."

"Just the same," said Paul, with a shake of his head, "society wouldn't back you up. A criminal shouldn't be at large, and society should protect itself from murderers by removing them, while a lunatic may be perfectly harmless. After all, it's my private opinion that a lot more lunatics are outside of institutions than are in them — and worse ones, too."

"From what I know of people inside and outside the institution," laughed the girl, "I agree with you. You can take that handbill along if you want to."

It was with interest that they surveyed the towered building as they passed. Even Willy seemed to know that they were interested, and looked, too. But he soon lost interest, for he saw no cats, and buried bones were of no immediate interest to him then.

"We ought to make Shirley by this evening," said Paul, "and if a thunder shower doesn't upset things, this is just the night to sleep outdoors."

But Maryannelizabeth thought otherwise. She stopped a scant half-mile beyond the asy-

lum and refused to go on. She seemed overcome with the heat. Nothing Paul could do would induce her to move.

Paul groaned. "Of course you *would* have to die right in the sun, wouldn't you?" he said, resignedly. He got out and looked her over. Apparently she was all right. She had a slight fever in her engine, but otherwise she seemed healthy. She had plenty of gasoline, plenty of water, and enough, but not too much, oil. Paul got in again and started — or attempted to. Maryannelizabeth refused to start.

A man who was hoeing in a field came to the fence and watched in silence.

Paul looked up. "Got a 'phone?" he asked. The man shook his head. Paul looked around the skyline. No telltale wires marked telephone service. So he grimly set about another examination of Maryannelizabeth's interior. June and Willy and the "Man With the Hoe" watched him.

"Can I help?" asked June.

"No. Keep out of the sun." Paul's voice was rather sharp and his face showed his exasperation. "Plague take the old flivver, anyway!"

“Havin’ trouble?” asked the man with the hoe, mildly.

Paul snorted. “There’s nothing for it, June, but for me to go to the village to that garage we passed. Unless I find a ’phone along the way. You stay here.”

June pushed the damp hair back from a wet forehead.

“Couldn’t Willy and I go over under those trees, Dad? It would be cooler.”

Paul turned to the man with the hoe. “They your trees?”

“Yep.”

“Do you mind if my daughter and her dog go over there in the shade?”

“Nup.”

“Thanks. I’ll be back as soon as I can make it.”

The man went on hoeing and Paul set off through the blistering sun toward the town they had just left, and June and Willy set out for the line of trees down in the hollow across two sunny fields.

Willy seemed rather bored by everything. His ears and his tail drooped. He looked like some one being taken somewhere against his

will, resigned to his fate, but not enjoying it at all. He was so tame and quiet that June took off his leash.

“Poor thing,” she said. “Don’t keep that hot leather thing on. Be free!”

Willy shook himself. Then with a shrill yelp he started off through the grass.

“Willy!” cried June alarmed. “Willy! Come back here!”

But Willy only tossed his ears more wildly and leaped over a tall stalk of chicory.

June forgot the heat and the sun and everything except the fact that Willy was running away, and although she believed he would come back to her — she thought dogs did that, but she wasn’t sure — he might get into mischief in the meantime. Didn’t dogs kill chickens, or eat eggs, or kill sheep, or something?

“Willy!” she called, persuasively. “Come, Willy. Nice doggie!”

Willy paused, resting on his fore-elbows, his hindquarters high, with his tail waving like a conquering banner. Then with a joyous bark, he tossed his ears again and was off. Again he stopped and charged, with open mouth, panting, and then ran away again. It was great



fun. It seemed to June's irritated eyes that he was grinning at her. Perhaps he was.

Finally June chased him into the shade of the trees, and there Willy forgot his game. He sniffed. There were holes in the roots of the trees — intriguing holes. He began to hunt, industriously, and June followed, glad that he was quieting down, and hoping he would forget his game and let her get close enough to put the leash on him again.

He worked over toward a clump of elderberry-bushes which fringed the margin of a little stream. Then he stopped. So did June, for a voice came to them quite distinctly. It was a cultured, pleasant voice, with a rich depth to it.

“Where the sun shines on the highway,  
Where the birds sing on the byway,  
That's the road that will be my way,  
All the day.”

The voice paused, then went on in prose this time. “Not so bad! Hm! Mrs. Blank, good day to you. May I show you my line of soft, soothing soaps for sensitive skins? Absolutely guaranteed not to rub, burn, chap, or irritate in any way the tenderest skin. Have

you a baby in your home, Madam? Try this powder — ”

June peeped through the elderberry-bushes, and her eyes grew round with excitement. A young man stood in a grassy clearing, entirely surrounded with elders bearing their lace-like flowers and filling the air with their heavy fragrance. He was of medium height, dark, and his eyes, which were fixed upon an elderberry-bush with stern intent, were blue. His voice, as she had noted before, was cultured and pleasant, and he was reciting poetry! The lunatic! What should she do? If she only had a rope, she might surprise him and capture him. If she had some one to help her — if he would only stay there until Paul came — if — if — . Oh, it was maddening to have a lunatic almost caught! Like the boy scout and the bear, only the bear had the boy scout and the boy scout couldn't let go, while she had the lunatic — or at least she didn't have him — And, after all, she might have known she could leave it to Willy.

Willy gave a series of agonized yelps and dashed into the clearing and proceeded to tear around it — around and around and around,

yelping, until June was dizzy. She plunged in after him, then stopped. He was not playing now. Something had happened to him. His eyes were wild and he was galloping as if something were at his heels and he was — he *was*! — foaming at the mouth.

The lunatic had turned at Willy's first yelp and watched him for an instant, as did June, both startled and alarmed.

"He's mad!" she screamed and jumped back. "Oh, Willy! Poor, poor Willy! — Go away! Oh, go away!"

The lunatic advanced. "Don't scream that way," he said, quietly. "You'll excite him more. What's his name? Willy? — Here, Willy. Come, Willy." He made a sudden grab and caught Willy as he went past and held him firmly.

"He'll bite you," gasped June. "He's mad."

The lunatic knelt and felt Willy's heaving ribs and stroked him gently. Willy continued to yelp, shrilly, and enthusiastically.

"He isn't mad," said the lunatic.

"But he's foaming at the mouth and running — "

“ Well? You don’t know much about dogs, do you? Let me tell you, half the dogs that are killed are not mad at all, but have been hurt or are hunting water or have been tortured by some kid.”

His hands had been feeling experimentally here and there on Willy’s body — long, slender, brown hands, they were — and suddenly they stopped on Willy’s nose. They wiped away the froth, and then felt, and Willy howled.

“ Ah, here it is! Since it takes both hands to hold this bunch of fur, suppose you fetch me some mud, please? ”

“ Mud? ”

“ Yes. Sorry to ask it, your Highness, but after all he’s your dog.”

“ *Mud?* ”

“ M-u-d. Mud. There’s the creek and there’s some earth, so bring me a generous handful, will you? — Please? All right, old chap, just a second and you’ll feel fine. Just lie quiet and think of only pleasant things! ”

June suddenly remembered that the best way to deal with lunatics was to humor them. So she scooped up a handful of oozy mud from



the bank of the little creek and brought it to him. He held Willy's nose.

"Put it right there, please — See that bump? Fine!" He smoothed it over with a thumb and Willy stopped yelping. He tried to lick the thumb. He panted or grinned. And he thumped the earth with his tail. He told in various ways that he felt much, much better. He felt so much better that he sighed and closed his eyes, as if to tell them both that he was worn out and desired to sleep and he should not be aroused for anything smaller than a wood-chuck.

June swallowed her pride. "What — what was it?" she asked.

"Something stung him. A bee, perhaps, or a hornet." Willy opened one eye and licked his thumb. "Poor old chap. Nobody knew what was wrong with him!"

Willy sighed and rolled over. Those gentle brown hands knew just where he had always wanted to be scratched.

"Oh," whispered June. "And I thought he was mad! He was suffering — I knew he put his nose into holes! — He was suffering and I never knew it! — He — he loved me

right from the very first time when I thought he was a ghost and now he'll never forgive me — Do you suppose? ”

She knew she was talking incoherently, and she knew that tears were in her eyes and in her voice, but Willy, *her* Willy, was licking a stranger's hand because a stranger had relieved him.

“ A man wouldn't forgive — and a woman wouldn't — unless maybe your mother — But a dog — Well, just try him.”

June touched Willy gently and Willy licked her hand and rolled up his adoring eyes and thumped his tail, and a tear fell on his muddy nose. But the lunatic didn't see, for he was looking in the other direction.

And suddenly June knew that she didn't care if he *was* a lunatic and did quote poetry to elderberry-bushes. He could quote a whole volume of Shakespeare to all the elderberry-bushes in the country and she wouldn't give him up to the keepers again!

## CHAPTER XII

“ THIS IS VERY MIDSUMMER MADNESS ”

June gave Willy one more pat and then rose briskly.

“ Come, Willy,” she remarked.

The lunatic turned. “ Don’t go! I mean that you shouldn’t take your pup out into the hot sun so soon.”

Willy sighed and closed his eyes.

“ You see,” went on the young man, “ he is really tired, and it would do him heaps of good to lie still. Where did you get him? You said something about a ghost, if I remember correctly.”

June hesitated. Then in her mind a daring plan exploded. She decided, not only *not* to turn him over to the asylum, but to help him to get away! She would urge her father to give him a lift, and then let him go safely. She felt she owed him that much for helping Willy.

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So she sat down and told him the thrilling tale of the haunted house and Willy's appearance, and the young man enjoyed it. He grinned all the way through it, when he wasn't laughing outright.

“I like Willy a whole lot,” she ended. “You see, I never had a pet before.”

“That's tough,” sobering suddenly. “Do your folks object to pets around the house?”

“No. I don't live at home — I have no mother, and I am at school except in the summer when I go around with Dad. We're — we're like knights of old on a quest.”

“Just what kind of a quest could a girl fare forth on? Or are they slaying dragons and rescuing princes in distress in these days of equal rights?”

June smiled and reflected that he little knew how close to truth the latter was. “We're hunting some one,” she said. “Some one who disappeared long, long ago.”

“Ha! The plot thickens! Each year the hero and heroine fare forth upon the open highway to find the lost che-ild who was abducted by gypsies.”

“Speaking of gypsies,” put in June, hur-



riedly, "we had another adventure last night."

"As exciting as the haunted house?"

"In a different way." And then she told him about the gypsy treasure, wondering the while why her father didn't come for her or sound his horn. Surely he had returned by this time! The young man listened to the tale with flattering interest while Willy whiffled in his sleep. June stopped in the middle of the prophecy, for there wasn't any sense in telling him of the man with the blue eyes — his own were so intensely blue — and he wouldn't understand the reference to the little house at the curve of the road.

"You do have interesting adventures!" he said.

"I always do," she nodded. "All kinds of foolish things happen to me. I keep them all in a book. I call it my 'Book of Foolish Adventures.' It helps to make them more interesting when I think how I'm going to write them down. And it's fun to read them to the girls."

She wondered what he would think if he knew that she was living the most thrilling adventure of her whole life right then — helping a hand-



SO SHE SAT DOWN AND TOLD HIM THE THRILLING TALE OF  
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some young lunatic to escape from an asylum!

“I should think it would,” he agreed. “I like to write, too — poetry mostly.”

Shakespeare! In another minute he would tell her — perhaps even recite some of his sonnets. But just at that moment she heard a voice calling her from near by.

“Here I am, Dad,” she called back, and Willy, still playing the part of an invalid, yelped faintly. “Willy’s had an accident. He — he — collided with a bee, or something.”

Willy wagged his tail, feebly, as Paul came through the elders. Paul looked surprised at seeing the young man, and June explained.

“If it hadn’t been for this young man knowing all about mud, he would be running around in circles yet.”

Paul laughed. “Well, June, I don’t know what it’s all about, but if the young man’s knowledge of mud prevents him from running around in circles, it is quite valuable knowledge.”

They all laughed. Wonderful, June thought, what a sense of humor lunatics have.

“Willy was doing the running,” she gurgled, “and I thought he was mad, but it was only a



bee-sting on his nose. And wasn't it clever to put mud on his nose? "

" Very. Poor Willy," sympathized Paul. Willy whined and rolled his eyes up, and waved one paw vaguely.

" Did you find a garage man, Dad? "

" No. He'd gone home."

" There's a garage in Cloverdale," volunteered the young man. " I noticed it as I came through this morning."

Paul looked at him. " You don't live in this section, then? Pity. You look like a person who would have a 'phone. My car died."

The young man looked up with a gleam in his eyes. " I know a little about cars, though I'm a soap salesman just at present. Perhaps I can find what's wrong. — Er — You have gas and oil in it? "

" For a wonder, yes."

Paul's eyes met June's questioningly. Being behind the stranger, she tapped her forehead and made a circling motion with her finger to indicate wheels. He looked rather puzzled.

" I'd be glad if you'd look at it," he suggested, " and we can give you a lift to the nearest town." He looked about him, whim-

sically. “This doesn’t look like very good territory for a soap salesman.”

“I’d be glad to,” assented the young man with alacrity, and a spark of appreciation kindled in Paul’s eye. Perhaps, he thought, if June had been a boy, or less attractive, the prospect of tinkering with a stranded vagabond car would not have been so appealing.

“I am Paul Severne,” he hinted, judging that June had not introduced them because she didn’t know the stranger’s name.

The blue eyes twinkled. “Delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Severne,” he said, soberly. “I am Max Hershfield.”

“You’ve changed considerably since I saw you last,” said Paul, drily.

For a second the two men looked at each other, then to June’s surprise, the younger one became red and confused.

“I thought you were joking — I — . Of course you *are* Mr. Severne — and I *have* heard you play. But I thought — because you looked like him — I didn’t mean to be fresh — I’m Jerry Laughton.”

“It’s all right. Such is fame,” laughed Paul. “Come on, Willy. Stop shamming.”

He led the way to the stranded car, with June and Jerry following, and a subdued Willy limping along in the rear, seeming to have forgotten that his nose was the wounded part. June tried to figure out the cleverness of the lunatic in telling her father he was some one else. She had fully expected him to blurt out, "William Shakespeare," and have her father take him into custody, without giving her a chance to plead for him. Still, she had heard that lunatics were sometimes clever in hiding their lunacy. He even had a small sample-case, she noticed, and she would not be surprised if he had cakes of real soap in it.

"There she lies," said Paul, pointing to Maryannelizabeth in the middle of the hot, dusty road. "And what's the matter with her, I don't know."

"Her name is Maryannelizabeth," June added.

"Ah," said Jerry, soberly, "it's always best to know the customer's — I mean the patient's — name. Let me see if I can pour soft soap through the troubled waters of her spirit. Maryannelizabeth — what a pretty name. Any one can see you have inherited a love of

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beauty from your cultured ancestors. Or why should you have chosen such a beautiful spot for a picnic on this lovely afternoon? The view is indeed remarkable.”

Right then June gasped so audibly that both Paul and Jerry turned to look at her. Across the field came the man with the hoe — only without it this time — walking between two men in uniform. As he came he declaimed in a loud voice:

“‘I prithee let me bring thee where crabs grow;  
And I with my long nails will dig thee pignuts;  
Show thee a jay’s nest and instruct thee how  
To snare the nimble marmoset; I’ll bring thee  
To clustering filberts and sometimes I’ll get thee,  
Young scamels from the rock. Wilt thou go with  
me’?”

The three of them clambered over the fence.

“Well I remember the day I penned those words,” went on the man, as the three of them crossed the road. “We sat on a settle before the fire in the Mermaid Tavern — Ben Jonson was there, too, an I mistake not. I borrowed his great knife to sharpen me a new quill, and I dipped the point of the sleeve of my jerkin into a dab of ale which lay spilled upon the



rough table. I can hear the noise of Ben Jonson's laughter and the scrape of his feet in the rushes on the floor — ”

They had climbed the other fence and their voices were muffled and indistinct and trailed away altogether.

“ The — the lunatic,” babbled June. “ I thought — I thought — . And I was helping you to escape because you saved Willy! ”

She looked at Jerry accusingly, and Jerry stared at her. Then, without any warning Jerry and Paul exploded. They sat down in the weeds by the fence and whooped, and June laughed, too, although she felt foolish. “ I heard you reciting poetry — ” she gurgled.

“ Did you hear me spouting? Then I'll admit the appearances *were* against me! ”

“ But you don't understand,” went on June.

“ They told us at the tea-room that the lunatic thought he was Shakespeare and quoted his poetry every time he got the chance. So — . Otherwise, I wouldn't have thought *you* were the lunatic just because one happened to be loose! ”

“ I don't blame you,” Jerry assured her, and then he laughed again. “ Anyway, I gave you

the idea when I said perhaps girls went about rescuing princes in distress in these days of equality.”

“You didn’t give me the idea at all,” she denied, hotly. “I thought of it myself! I had already made up my mind not to give you up to the keepers after all you’d done for Willy. And I was just howling inside when you said that about my having adventures. Now you’ve spoiled a perfectly good adventure!”

“Oh, I hope I haven’t! I can see much greater possibilities than if I had really been a lunatic.” She dimpled suddenly, and he noticed it. “You see, so do you. Anyway, I appreciate your realizing that I was harmless — lunatic or not. You’re a true knight of the road, and recognize the hail-fellow camaraderie of the open highway, which is quite different from the hail-fellow of the town and city street loafer. Too bad life can’t all be like that — free and easy and clean. — To prove further that I am to the best of my knowledge and belief reasonably sane, I refer you to Dean Graves of Clayton College. No, on second thought, I guess I’d better not. Unfortunately he suspects me of taking a skeleton to

study hall one evening — one besides my own, I mean. It wasn't my fault that the lights failed that night, but I'll admit that I did take advantage of it and I'll never forget my roommate's face when he saw that skeleton sitting across the table from him."

"All of which goes to prove, June," said Paul, wiping his eyes, "that all lunatics are not in padded cells."

Jerry sprang up. "Now let's try the fair Maryannelizabeth again. My dear Maryannelizabeth, how well you're looking! You have that slender silhouette. I wish I could reduce! My dear, I eat hardly anything — between meals. I do envy you your straight lines. What a becoming bonnet you are wearing!" He peered into the engine as he talked. "What a beautiful complexion. I have a toilet soap guaranteed to keep the hands soft and white and to preserve that girlish complexion. But I see you do not need it. Just a dash of stove polish here and there and — my dear!"

Paul tinkered with the starter and Maryannelizabeth began to purr. Paul and Jerry looked at each other. Paul looked surprised

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but Jerry looked simply dumfounded, and, for once, speechless.

“What did you do to it?” asked Paul.

“Absolutely nothing. I only looked at it.”

“And talked at it. What a thing it is to have the gift of the gab!”

Willy cocked an ear and listened to the racing engine. “Wuff, wuff!” he cried joyfully, and sprang to the front seat. Only June remained unmoved. Jerry had done it. Certainly. Why not?

“Well, that settles it, Jerry,” said Paul. “Pile in. Willy has given you his paw and heart, and Maryannelizabeth has given you her engine and wheel. Want to drive, June? I’ll sit in the back and hold the soap samples. — Don’t let Willy lick your chin!”

“That’s all right. It’s Gilliams’ best — comes in both cream and soap — guaranteed not to hurt the tenderest skin. — Like the flavor of my shaving cream, pup? Ha! Another talking point in favor of Gilliams’! Pleasing to the taste!”



## CHAPTER XIII

### A QUIET WEEK-END

“Do we try to make Shirley this evening, Dad?” June called back over her shoulder.

Paul looked at his watch. “We’ll have to, June. We can stop for something to eat, though, if you’re hungry, and then push on. Mail is waiting for us at the Mountain House, and we’re a few days behind schedule. I’d planned to stay over the week-end. How about it, June? Would you like to be under a roof for a change?”

“M-mm,” said June, doubtfully. “Of course we had to pick a hot one, didn’t we?”

“How about you, Jerry? Would you like to stop over and go on with us?”

“Sure would!” The expression on Jerry’s face left no doubt about it.

June said nothing, but she was glad, and she knew that her father knew it, too. She had

been thinking of leaving Jerry with a little pang of regret. He was so pleasant, and said such unexpected things, and laughed at her drolleries with such appreciative heartiness, and listened to her comments with such flattering attention, that she knew she would miss him when their ways separated. She hoped they would have time to become good friends before they did have to part.

Jerry would stay a while longer, and there would be mail when they got to Shirley — Mail, and clean, fresh sheets, and a chance to dress up in girls' clothes for a little while. Her heart sang a little song of happiness as they went along.

Jerry had a road map, and he spread it out and studied it thoughtfully. Then he turned it around.

“ Maps are always written upside down,” he commented, “ and I can never remember it, for some reason.”

“ I long ago gave up trying to read them,” said June. “ I let Dad find out where we are, and then if he's wrong — that's just another adventure. But if I tried to find the way and were wrong, that would be a mistake.”

"That's feminine logic of some kind," laughed Paul.

Jerry frowned over the map. "That last town we passed was Whiteville."

"What town?" asked June. "I don't remember passing any town."

"Three houses and a store and a garage, and a sign saying 'Whiteville.' You blinked just then and missed it. Ah, here it is. And here is Shirley. At the rate we're going we ought to reach there about eight o'clock to-night. Shall we take a chance on the dining-room being open? Or should we stop somewhere?"

"There aren't any places around six o'clock," said June. "All the tea-rooms are around three and ten."

"And they're all named 'Lindy Lunches', because of the flies."

"There used to be a 'Chatterbox' at school that made a specialty of tongue sandwiches," said June, solemnly.

Jerry passed the map back to Paul. "Mind looking at it, Mr. Severne? If you make a mistake, it's an adventure, and if Miss Severne is wrong, it's a mistake, but if I should be wrong it would be a catastrophic, cataclysmic calam-

ity, for I might get chucked out of the party.”

Paul studied it a moment. “Right! Keep straight on, June. Through Ashonomink to Shirley.”

Jerry began to sing, softly:

“I’ll be roamink  
In the gloamink  
In the town of Ashonomink,  
In the town of Ashonomink,  
Far Away!”

June laughed, and Willy licked Jerry’s chin.

They decided to take a chance on the Mountain House dining-room, although Willy watched the lengthening shadows with alarm, and whimpered once or twice.

“Poor Willy,” said June, “he’s hungry, so he is.”

“Too bad!” said Jerry. “He’s licked all the shaving cream off my chin. It tasted good, but it wasn’t very sustaining was it, pup?”

It was half-past seven when they arrived at the outskirts of the town, and June was really sorry, for the last five miles had been through wonderful scenery where the river cut through high mountains and the road followed it, wind-



ing along and opening up new vistas at every curve.

“ I do love mountains,” sighed June, stealing a split second from the road to glance at the skyline where the hills lay like folds of georgette, from misty blue to black against the sunset.

“ Watch yourself, June,” cautioned Paul. “ These curves need careful driving.”

“ I'd offer to take the wheel,” said Jerry, “ but we're just about there. There's a hot-dog stand by the waterfall. — Funny how beauty spots are added to, in some folks' opinions, by having refreshment stands and soft-drink signs scattered about. I remember how shocked I was to find Walden Pond turned into a public bathing-beach. Wonder what Thoreau would say if he could come back to see it? Perhaps he does haunt the spot on moonlight nights. I know several places I'd be tempted to haunt if some one exploited them that way.”

“ Just at present I can sympathize with the people who see beauty in hot dogs,” said June. “ That sunset reminds me of a dish of raspberries, with whipped cream — doesn't that big

cloud look like a spoonful of sweet, fluffy whipped cream? And there's a daisy that looks just like a fried egg."

"June," said Paul, "for goodness' sake watch the road, or we'll all look like hamburger steak."

"Wuf!" said Willy. They were talking about food at last!

And then, suddenly there they were, with the Mountain House built against the side of a mountain right before them.

June could hardly wait until the room-clerk gave her her key. She wanted to get dressed in her fluffiest dress — because Paul always like to see her dressed up.

She was the last to come down, and she was more than repaid for her pains by the way both Paul and Jerry stared at her. Paul pretended not to know her, and Jerry really didn't.

"Mail for you," said Paul, putting a regular sheaf of letters before her on the table, as they sat down to dinner.

June took them with a little squeal. "You order, Dad! I don't care what! Oh, here's one from Di — and one from Cathie — and one from Mary and —" she looked at Paul,

mischievously, "one from the football fan! And — I don't know whom this is from. Well, I declare! It's from Joyce. — She wants to be remembered to my stunning-looking, celebrated father." She wrinkled her nose at Paul impishly. "She must mean you, Dad, for I don't have two fathers."

"Poor 'orphant'," laughed Jerry. "Most of us have four."

"*Four?*"

"Sure. Didn't you ever hear of forefathers?" And even the waitress laughed at the old joke.

Although June asked to be excused while she read her mail, it was not necessary, for she read parts of her letters with little gurgles of delight. She even read the more romantic parts of Cathie's, for any one could tell that Cathie's streak of romance was as wide as her own plump self, and as Celtic and irresponsible as the whole Irish race, and was fully capable of embracing a dozen Prince Charmings at once. There was nothing confidential about Cathie's most serious "crushes."

June finished the last crumb of her pie and sighed.

“ I ate more than you did,” challenged Jerry.

“ Well, I should hope so. Look how far it had to go! ”

Jerry took out his cigarette case, hesitated, and looked at Paul. Paul’s eyes twinkled, but his face was inscrutable. One never knew these days. “ Have a cigarette, June? ”

“ Thanks. I don’t smoke.”

“ I’m glad.”

Her amber eyes met his squarely. “ I thought boys liked girls who smoked — called them ‘ pally ’ and ‘ good sports ’.”

“ Perhaps some do. But somehow — Dad always taught me to regard women as something finer than we blundering men. He is a gentleman of the old school — Southern training and all that, you know. Mother is just like a Dresden shepherdess, dainty and sweet. She uses a perfume that Dad has made to order in France. It is her one extravagance. My Aunt Edith always uses violet sachet and perfume, and I can remember when I was a little chap, I used to like to bury my nose in her silk shoulders when she kissed me. She used to laugh, and wondered why I did it. Violets have always meant Aunt Edith to me ever since.



And lavender — I only have to go through a store where it is on sale, or catch a whiff of it from a street vendor's basket, and I am back in my grandmother's house with its colonial furniture, high-posted beds, lavender-scented sheets. I can even see the whitewashed fence and the hollyhocks, and the sundial in the old-fashioned garden. So, when I think of girls, who should be sweet as roses, perfuming their clothes and their breaths with tobacco it makes me feel sad, somehow. Guess I'm old-fashioned or something."

He broke off with a laugh. Paul's eyes were seeing into the distance, and there was a sad droop to his lips. Jerry could not know that down the years had come a whiff of mignonette.

In a second he was himself again, even before Jerry had had time to wonder at the suspicion of tears in June's eyes.

"Did I put my foot in it?" he whispered as they went out to the veranda together. "Your father seemed —"

"There's a great tragedy in Dad's life, Jerry. He doesn't speak of it even to me — so — I'd rather *he'd* tell you —"

“ Oh, sure. — So that’s why they call him ‘ The violinist with the broken heart ’ ? ”

“ Yes. It’s why we’re here, too — the quest I told you about. — Let’s get him to go for a walk along the river.”

The next morning dawned bright and sunny. June awoke early, and lay luxuriating in the soft bed, and missing the lapping of the lake water which, although it had greeted her but two mornings, had nevertheless made itself a part of her thoughts.

It was to be a quiet week-end. June rose and dressed leisurely in her non-crushable white georgette. She pinned a spray of artificial apple-blossoms on her shoulder and shook out her white silk hat which had rolled up comfortably in a corner of her suitcase. With her pair of white canvas pumps and her one pair of white silk stockings, she looked like a different being from the girl who had alighted from the car the night before. As an after-thought, she came back to her suitcase and rummaged around in it, finally finding a tiny phial. Just a touch with the cork of it, for the essence was strong, and a delicate scent of orange blossoms floated around her. A drop of it clung

to her fingers as she replaced the cork, and she touched it to her curving upper lip.

“Not that *he'll* ever know,” she thought, then laughed. “I’m ashamed of you,” she scolded herself, as a dash of color shone in her cheeks. “You’re worse than Cathie!”

The first part of the day’s program went off without hitch. The three of them went to church, and then took a short walk. The afternoon was to be spent in taking a long and famous walk through the mountains, but at noon the sky became very much overcast, and they decided to stick close to the hotel veranda. They watched the storm come up like opposing armies in battle array. Then the whole world was bathed in a yellow glow, as it had been the night June and Paul had taken refuge in the “Haunted House.” Without further warning the full fury of the storm was upon them. They pushed their chairs back against the house, and finally took refuge in the living-room, laughing at their retreat.

June watched the rain descending in sheets, and sighed. “It reminds me of Niagara,” she said, “viewed from the bottom. I think I’ll go upstairs and write some letters.”

She was in the midst of her first letter when her father called her. "June! Come on down if you want to see something funny. You'll want to put this into your letters."

June hastily joined him and they went down the stairs and looked over the banisters. The living-room and the office were both flooded. The water was lapping the second step. It swirled about in little whirlpools, and in the midst of it the proprietor and the room-clerk were paddling about rescuing the perishable things, coming back with the news that the dining-room was flooded, too, and the rain had come down the chimney and put the fire out and ruined the chicken dinner which was the tradition of the house for Sunday night. That was calamity indeed.

"It's a cloudburst," the room-clerk informed them, "and of course we, being right on the side of the mountain, are getting it on three sides besides what is falling on us from the skies."

A crash of thunder and a brilliant flash of lightning startled them. June held her breath for a second, then laughed a little shakily.

"That hit somewhere near," said the room-



clerk. "However, it's not likely to start a forest-fire in a deluge like this."

Jerry splashed out in a bathing suit and waved to them genially. "It struck behind us a piece — up the hill."

"Bet they're scared in the Ridge House," grinned the clerk. Then his grin faded. The fire siren blew, striking a sudden chill to their hearts. Jerry plunged out on the rain-swept porch and peered through the curtain of rain.

The little fire engine was out in a jiffy and began to climb the hill, the engine puffing pluckily. The water was above the hubs of the wheels and spurted out in crested waves as it ploughed through. But right in front of the Mountain House where three rivers met, the water was deeper. The engine coughed, sputtered and died.

One of the firemen called something to Jerry and Jerry rushed into the living-room. "Bring buckets," he called to the room-clerk. "The fire engine can't make the grade, and it's the Ridge House."

In an instant every man in the house was out with a bucket. June dashed upstairs and

looked out of a fourth-story window. From there she had a splendid view of the road and the men climbing it, and the Ridge House. It was not a spectacular fire, of course, and there was nothing to see, so after a time she came down and sat on the stairs to wait for the men to come back.

Alarming things happened. The thunder and lightning and the loud roar of the rain terrorized her. A little bride whose new husband had joined the bucket brigade began to cry, but she laughed instead when June pointed out how foolish it was to add more water when there was already a superabundance. They became quite good friends there on the steps. They hung on to each other's hands when crashes told of a falling tree back in the woods. And they tried to reassure each other when a loud, muffled roar suddenly sounded toward the river. But the telephone was cut off, and they could only wait until some one who had braved the storm should come back to tell them what the strange sounds meant. The unearthly hooting of a train whistle added itself to the din of the elements. It was nightmarish, sitting there through the long afternoon hours.

Some of the women suggested donning bathing suits and sweeping the water out of the house. That was a practical plan now that the rain had abated, so they fell to with a will.

“There’ll be no dinner for yez,” the cook announced, just as they were ready for it. “Only crackers what I had on me top shelf. Even the milk’s went sour from the thunder. Ye can’t even have preserves unless ye want to dive for them, the cellar’s that full of water. I been workin’ here seven years, an’ I never seen nothin’ like this.”

They were disappointed, but they accepted it with nothing like the groan with which the men greeted it when they returned. One of them undertook to dive for preserves, and was a hero.

“Scared?” asked Paul, as they munched crackers and drank lemonade. “We thought about you.”

“A little,” confessed June. “There were so many strange noises. Trees were breaking, I suppose.”

“Worse than that,” said one of the men. “A tremendous boulder, loosened by the rush of water along the river drive, let go and made

a young avalanche down into the valley across the train tracks — dropped about two tons of earth and rock and a few full-grown trees right in front of the Eastern Express. If she had been on time it would have landed squarely on top of her, but she was reported ten minutes late at Branchtown. The station agent tried to wire back to hold her, but the wires had gone. So he and the baggage agent ran back with red lanterns and flags and stopped her just around the bend. That sure was a close call. The wrecking crew has come to clear up the débris, and the Eastern Express passengers are sent around to the Junction to meet another train. It's a mess."

June glanced up and saw the little bride oblivious to everything except her big young husband, and chuckled. She must tell Cathie about that. Thought of Cathie reminded her of her unfinished letters, and since Paul and Jerry were going to help the wrecking crew clear the mess off the track, she went up to her room, and settling herself comfortably on her bed, she chose a fresh sheet of paper and began.

"DEAR CATHIE:

"We have spent a quiet week-end — "



## CHAPTER XIV

### “ROMANCE RIDES THE SHADY WAY”

It was a glorious morning. June, standing on the hotel porch, wished they need not go on again. The wavy blue line of mountains before her, and the dark recesses of the pine woods behind her, were too alluring to leave. She wanted to walk far, far away through the fields where enormous heads of Queen Anne's Lace and great black-eyed Susans grew, and where the quail called the elfin Bob White, to the friendly hills. She wanted to prowl in the pine forest, slipping on the fallen needles, listening to the voice of the wind above her head, and the music of a hidden waterfall, and discovering with the thrill such a discovery always brought her, the frail, ghostly flowers of the Indian Pipe. To sit with her back against a tree — to look down into a misty valley —

“'Lo, June!” It was Jerry. He dropped

to a rocker beside her. “All ready for the long trek again, I see.”

She nodded. “I wish we didn’t have to go right away.”

“I could use a few days among the summer cottages back in the hills,” he hinted. “So don’t feel that you have to go on my account.”

“I wonder if Dad would stay?” breathed June, wistfully.

“I guess he’s eager to go,” said Jerry. “He told me last night about your mother, and I can imagine how he feels. Pretty tough, isn’t it? But what makes him feel that your mother is still alive? Has he any proof?”

“No. He just feels it, somehow.”

“Yes, I imagine you could feel that way about some one you loved very deeply — who was closely bound to you in thought and spirit. I’ve heard that mothers felt that way about their sons in the war. Do you remember her at all?”

“No. I was only two, you know.”

“Yes. Well — . Here he comes.”

“Hello, Dad. Any more mail?”

“What?” laughed Paul. “Mail? After all you had Saturday? You little pig! Just a telegram for me.”

"A telegram — ?" with a sharp intake of breath.

He laughed again as he sat down on the porch railing and swung one foot. "Telegrams are nothing in my young life, June."

He slit the flap of the yellow envelope with his penknife, clasped the knife and returned it to his pocket, and then read the few words the flimsy contained. His foot stopped swinging, and a thoughtful expression came over his face. He put the slip back into the envelope and looked toward the hills. Presently he turned back to June, who was watching him anxiously.

"A mysterious teacher of singing has been located in Baltimore," he said, slowly. "I must go at once, by train. And even so, I may be too late. The telegram was delayed because of the broken wires yesterday. I don't know what to do about you, June. I can't take you with me because I've got to make fast time — faster than I'd want you to travel. And yet — I hate to leave you alone —"

"Oh, pshaw, Dad! Mrs. Watson will look after me, and I can take Willy when I venture abroad."

“June, you’re a genius. I’ll speak to the proprietor’s wife right away.”

Jerry looked up as Paul was about to pass him. “Would you feel better if I arranged to go away until your return?”

“And leave me all by myself?” protested June.

“No,” said Paul, with a twinkle. “I’d feel much safer if I knew she wasn’t learning to smoke and flirt by spending her evenings with some of these girls at the hotel.”

June went in with him and offered to help him pack so that he could make the next train. He would not even wait for breakfast. It was some time later when they both came out — Paul with a small over-night bag. She walked with him to the foot of the hill, then she walked back slowly. She had made, it seemed, endless promises to be careful about speaking to strangers, especially men — even those at the hotel, and not to let any girl or man tell her it was sporting to do something she felt she ought not to do, and when in doubt to go to Mrs. Watson, the proprietor’s wife. June’s head fairly swam with the do’s and don’t’s he had given her.



"Life is very complex," she sighed, sitting down beside Jerry and watching his pencil traveling swiftly over a sheet of his sales-book. "Did you sell some soap already, Jerry?"

He gave a final twirl to a letter. "No. This is the poem I was spouting this afternoon. Want to hear it?"

"Yes!"

He struck an attitude and began in a sepulchral voice, not at all in accord with the poem:

"Where the sun shines on the highway,  
Where the birds sing on the byway,  
That's the road that will be my way,  
All the day."

"I think that's lovely!" cried June. "Have you done any more? Is that all of it? What's the title? What are you going to do with it?"

"One at a time! Sure, I've written a lot, batting around with soap I've gotten into the habit of making up verses as I go along. I haven't tried to do anything with them yet, but maybe some day — This hasn't got a title yet and it needs more stanzas to it. It doesn't sound complete, do you think? Sounds sort of like a fragment — a refrain or something."

“I think it’s just lovely!” repeated June, raptly. “I wish I could do as well.”

“Try it,” advised Jerry, with just a tinge of condescension, putting away his pencil and paper. “Let’s catch us some breakfast.”

Breakfast over, and Jerry vanished around the nearest curve, in search, as he flippantly expressed it, “of the great unwashed,” the day stretched before her full of possibilities, and barren of inspiration. She sought the latter from Mrs. Watson.

“There are lots of nice tramps to take,” smiled Mrs. Watson. “Back of us are the woods, as you know, with a lake and a gorgeous view from the top of the mountains. Away over there — see the splotch of red in the sunlight on that hillside away across the valley? That is the home of a famous singer, Madame Sergieff. Perhaps your father knows her?”

“No, he doesn’t. But I’ve heard of her a lot.”

“Well — her home is one of the show places. If you take a sightseeing trip this afternoon, the guide will tell you a little about it — the cost of it, and such details. Then of course there is the riverside walk.”

“ Well,” said June, “ Dad said he wouldn’t get back before to-morrow evening, so there will be two mornings and two afternoons to see all those things, so this morning I think I’ll just take Willy and walk down the road.”

Mrs. Watson smiled. “ It’s a very interesting road, and you’ll enjoy it, I know! ”

So June, with a wildly excited Willy, and a loaded camera, set forth seeking adventures on a perfectly strange road that went up and down hill and around curves enticingly, and hid its surprises well.

The elfin Bob White was still elusive, the mountains folded and unfolded in different perspective as the road curved and twisted and doubled back upon itself. Willy tugged at his leash. The fairies had spread their pocket handkerchiefs of Queen Anne’s lace out to dry, and the Meadow Pixies were busily engaged in making a fairy bridal veil of gossamer, set with pearls, using a bending sweetbrier for a loom.

Willy’s feet patted along, and her own feet fell into a marching rhythm, and she began to think of words to fit the time of their marching feet. After a while she said it aloud:

“With a heigh-ho, whistle and blow!  
With a laugh and a chuckle wherever you go,  
Sure, a smile’s made of gold,  
And a jest that is told  
Is a coin of the realm wherever you go!”

Willy looked back at her and wagged his tail, and cocked one ear.

“It sounds like a fragment of something,” she said, judicially. “I must think of some more to it.”

Still as they went along she found herself repeating the same words over and over. Then, suddenly she stopped still. A little stream ran laughing and singing along by the road, and suddenly the road swept around a curve, and there lay a cluster of houses — a church, a garage, a general store, and a few cottages, and a little farther on, where the stream ran under the road to ripple on the other side, there was a little bridge, and beside it were two twisted willows.

The gypsy’s foretold bridge and willows! June’s heart leaped. The road that lay golden and gray in the sunlight and shade was a road to romance, a veritable enchanted road down which could ride knights and fair ladies. She



paused on the bridge and imagined a knight was coming just around the curve — or perhaps —

With a joyful bark Willy snapped the leash out of her lax hand and sped off across the fields, a big, fluffy black animal before him in whole-hearted flight. For just a second June hesitated, then she set off in hot pursuit. The dragging leash was dangerous. Willy could hang himself on a fence or even on a shrub — or he could get caught and never get himself free. And the animal he was pursuing — June had seen just a glimpse of it when it sprang down from the tree — just enough to know that it was black (perhaps black and white) and had a bushy tail. Skunks were black and white with bushy tails, and if Willy caught a skunk they couldn't travel with him. Paul had said so! She just had to catch Willy!

She knew from experience that Willy would not stop at the sound of his name, so she tried to head him off. But Willy could run very fast! She was breathless before she had gone half way across the field, and the field was bumpy and where it wasn't bumpy there were hollows into which she stumbled. It was a wild chase. The black animal swerved, so did

Willy, so did June. All three plunged through a grove of trees and emerged on the windward side of a rose garden. The black animal sailed over a clipped hedge. Willy hunted for a hole, squeezed through, and June jumped the hedge and gained a few precious feet on Willy. But Willy was making up for lost time. The black animal sailed over a sundial. Willy ran around it, and June ran around it the other way, missing Willy's leash by inches and almost losing her balance in her frantic grab for it. Through a rose-covered arbor they ran, across a back porch, the black animal knocking down a dishpan in his flight, and Willy falling over it and sending it crashing tinnily down three stone steps — around the house, and straight through an open side door. The black animal first, then Willy. June stopped, horrified.

Willy was chasing a skunk into a perfectly strange house. Oh, what could she do? Oh, wasn't Willy a mess!

A startled exclamation in a guttural voice, and a big feminine figure appeared in the shadowy interior beyond the door. It was a squarely built figure, clad, as to the upper por-

tion, in a peasant blouse of white voile, cross-stitched in bright red and yellow and blue, and as to the lower part, in a tremendous red skirt, with a little black apron over it. She stood squarely in the path of the rushing Willy. He never stopped but plunged through the red skirt, was enveloped, emerged at the other side and tore along the hall, his toenails clicking against the polished wood.

“ I’m sorry,” gasped June. “ But my dog is chasing a skunk through your house! ”

The figure came closer and June shrank back. It was a rather formidable advance — relentless, smothering. Her face was square and high in the cheek bones, and her eyes on either side of her flat nose were gray and hard. She gave an impression of inhuman stolidity and immovability.

“ My — my dog — ” stammered June.

Then the woman began to speak. Her voice rose shrilly and the words tumbled over themselves. June didn’t know what the woman was saying, but she was certainly using a lot of words, all of them sounding different, and she gesticulated with hands and arms and head, and the billowing of her ample skirt showed that

she gesticulated with, apparently, her whole body.

“What on earth,” came another voice, “what on *earth* is happening?”

The woman turned. Another woman had come into the hall — a slender, graceful slip of a woman, with a face like ivory, and hair like spun silver, and a voice like silver bells muffled in velvet.

The big woman began again, heaving and billowing and using more words.

“Sonia!” The sweet voice was still low, but it carried authority. Although June had no way of knowing, she was sure that she stopped in the exact middle of a word, certainly she stopped in the middle of a gesture and in a mid-billow. As a sort of anti-climax, she shut her mouth slowly.

“I’m sorry,” faltered June, almost in tears. “But Willy has chased a skunk into your house.”

“Ah,” said the big woman, triumphantly, producing June, as it were, red-handed. “A skonnik. A skonnik, ah?”

There was indeed a commotion inside the house. The lady said a few words to the big



woman, who gathered her skirts around her and fled precipitately in the direction away from the "skonnik."

"Come and let us rescue Willy," she said to June. "I do not think it is a skunk, really. I think it is Mentu-Hotep."

"Meant to what?" asked June.

"Look!"

They stopped in the doorway of a room to the left of the hall. A big black animal with a bushy tail was perched on top of a bookcase, and Willy was frantically trying to reach it, jumping up and down hard. Once the small rug on which he stood slid under his feet and carried him away a little piece. But he returned to the chase with added gusto, perhaps feeling in his canine mind that the animal had pushed him.

When June took a calm and unhurried look at the creature it resolved itself into a gigantic black Persian cat, with topaz eyes and white whiskers. As Willy jumped up, the cat put out a lazy paw and patted him on the nose. Willy nearly turned himself inside out with fury at the insult.

The silver-haired lady laughed. She lifted

the great cat from the bookcase, and rested her pointed chin in the soft fur.

“My cat, named after an old Egyptian king, Mentu-Hotep.”

Willy jumped up and down like a toy dog on springs. The lady laughed again. When she laughed it was like listening to a fountain — a fountain in an enchanted garden where the Princess walked at dusk. And her eyes were deep blue, like pieces of royal blue velvet — if you can imagine velvet with twinkles in it — and shaded by long black lashes. Her eyebrows were black, too, so that she seemed like a young girl making up with powdered hair for a masquerade.

“Oh, I’m sorry Willy was so bad,” said June, contritely. “He got away from me!”

“Poor child,” said the lady, softly. “You are terribly warm and tired. You must be. Sit down, and I shall sing to you.”

And June suddenly realized who the lady was. Olga Sergieff herself!

## CHAPTER XV

### TOPAZES AND OLD GOLD

“ But that is too much,” said June. “ First I intrude, Madame, and then — ”

Madame made an airy gesture with her delicate hands. “ Poof! I want you to stay! Or do you not like music? Perhaps you do not wish that I should bore you — No? ”

“ Oh, I’d love it!” protested June, and Madame laughed again.

“ Come then and bring Willy.”

Holding Mentu-Hotep on one arm she led the way to an adjoining room where there was a grand piano, deep, comfortable chairs, and a canary in a cage in the window.

Willy sniffed, curiously and audibly. Then he lay down on a rug and put his nose between his paws. Madame sat down on the piano bench and Mentu-Hotep sat down beside her. He looked once at Willy, yawned insultingly, and began to wash his face.

Madame swung around. “ You have the

advantage of me — I do not know your name, Amber Girl.”

“ Oh, June — June Severne.”

“ June? I used to know a girl named June — I think.” The blue eyes looked puzzled.

“ June — June — Severne — Severne is familiar, too.”

“ You are thinking of my father, perhaps. He is Paul Severne, the violinist.”

“ Oh, yes! I have heard of him, but I do not know him — No. Is your mother’s name June? ”

“ No. Mother’s name was Olive.”

“ Was? Ah, she is not any more? That is tragic! That is why they call your father — the violinist with the heartbreak? Yes? Ah, I too have lost — ” The blue eyes widened with a look of pain for a moment, then she turned to the piano and began to play.

June sat enthralled. Madame sang one song after another — gypsy songs, Russian folk songs, some sad, others rollicking. She sang a group of love songs of different nationalities — Irish, French, Italian. She sang a group of lullabies, and the canary crooned to itself in the cage.



Somewhere a clock struck. Madame turned. Willy stirred restlessly. June looked up, her eyes cloudy with dreams, like one interrupted while reading.

"You are an appreciative listener," said Madame. "I like you much. You stay to lunch with me — yes?"

"Oh, I should go back," said June, springing up. "Really. It is terrible to stay like this —"

"Where is your home?"

"We're at the Mountain House, Dad and I — Dad is away for a day or two on — on business."

"And you would lunch alone in a hotel? *Na, na, cherie*. Hotels are nice things to keep away from. And hotel cooking — Faugh! Wait until you taste my Sonia's Russian cooking. Ah, then you will be glad you stayed. Sonia will be displeased if you run away now. We must not displease Sonia! She might leave me, and what would I do without my Sonia?"

So June laughingly gave in, and she and Willy and Madame and Mentu-Hotep went to lunch together in the yellow dining-room. While they ate, June told Madame of the

summer's adventures, and Madame laughed joyously, especially at the story of the finding of Willy and the finding of the lyric lunatic. But at the prophecy of the gypsy she looked at June through a mist of tears.

"Does a home mean so much to you, Girl of the Amber Eyes? Four walls and covering from the weather —" She looked about her and sighed. "One can have all those and still not be happy."

"I should want other things, too, which make a house into a home, Madame," thinking that perhaps the other's Russian mind had confused the two. "I should want love — friends — a warm hearth —" She looked at Madame. "Does Russia have homes?"

The sad blue eyes lifted. "Russia? No. Not like that. Not as you mean. Do not let us talk of homes. Tell me more about the lunatic who recited poetry!"

So June told, and she continued the story of her adventures up to the time Willy began to chase the "skunk." And the laughter came back to the velvet-blue eyes, and she laughed again with the ripple from the enchanted gardens.

“ You must bring him to see me,” she cried, clapping her hands. “ To-night! But yes! I will not take no! Soon you will be gone and I may have to go miles to see you again! Please! It is not often Olga Sergieff says please. She says ‘ do so ’ and it is done. But because she loves you, little girl of the amber eyes, she says ‘ please ’.”

“ If — if he will,” said June.

“ That is better! To-night! — You must eat a lot of these cookies! Sonia makes them so splendidly. They are Russian cookies. You like them? ”

Sonia bustled about serving them, and more than once when Madame laughed, June caught an expression in the gray eyes of the Russian woman, an expression of joy and love, and when they turned toward June they were no longer hostile, but warm and friendly and kind.

Madame insisted that June should stay well into the afternoon, and then she promised to call at the hotel for the two of them that evening.

June left the door and walked through the rose garden, keeping tight hold of Willy's

leash this time. Sonia intercepted her at the arbor.

“Miss — ” The servant’s voice was harsher in tone and her English was not as perfect as Madame’s. “Miss — I thank you — Madame, she is sad — so verree sad — But she laugh to-day.” She caught June’s hand and kissed it impulsively. “Goo’-by, Miss.”

June met Jerry on the way. He looked relieved when he saw her, and then frowned.

“Where in the world have you been?” he demanded. “When you didn’t come back for lunch Mrs. Watson looked at me as if she thought I had murdered you and thrown your body in the well!”

“Oh, Jerry, I’ve been — ”

“I don’t want to know where you’ve been,” said Jerry, inconsistently. “You were very selfish and thoughtless to go off like that for so long!”

“Oh,” said June, in a small voice. She walked along beside him, half hurt and half angry. Then her lips twitched. “Jerry — ”

Jerry strode on, with eyes fixed on a point several feet ahead of them.

They reached the bridge and the willows.



The road looked even more like a gleaming path of romance under the long shadows. June looked back wistfully.

“Look, Willy,” she said, softly, “there is where the skunk was! Wouldn’t Jerry enjoy hearing about that?” Jerry kept on looking straight ahead. If anything his back became a little stiffer. “When he gets over being mad,” she confided to Willy, “we’ll tell him about Madame Sergieff and her invitation to both of us.”

He looked at her sharply and incredulously. She caught his eye before he could turn his head away. He flung out both hands in a gesture of surrender. “All right, all right! A skunk and Madame Sergieff — What wild thing have you been doing now?”

“It wasn’t I. It was Willy! You see it was like this. Willy found a skunk up a tree —”

The recital lasted all the way to the hotel.

“You’ll be the death of me yet,” he gasped when the tale was told. “Who but you and Willy would chase a skunk and catch a Prima Donna? I ask you!”

“Do you suppose —” said June, breath-

lessly, "do you suppose she could be an exiled duchess or something?"

"Perhaps," nodded Jerry. "You never can tell, these days."

The possibility gave them food for thought and conjecture right up to the time Madame's car came for them. And at the last moment a telegram arrived for June, which threw her into a panic until Jerry sensibly suggested that she should open it. It was from her father, saying that the music teacher had left town and would be back on Thursday. He would stay and wait for her, and arrive at the Mountain House again late Friday night.

"It's rather fun," said June, as the chauffeur helped her into Madame's luxurious car. "Of course I wish Dad were here to meet Madame, but I'm glad I can stay a while. What are you going to do?"

"Don't know yet. I guess there are enough soapless people among the cottages to make it worth while to stay a while longer. To-day was the best day I've had this summer. That's why I knocked off early and had my brainstorm when I found Mrs. Watson scared pink about you."

"I'm really sorry." She sank back into the cushions and sighed. "Isn't this heavenly?"

Madame's car and Maryannelizabeth were not in the same class, socially. They were not even sisters under their paint. And the chauffeur reminded June of an automatic man of artistically painted tin. He seemed to be worked by the same mechanism as his car. June enjoyed him all the way to Madame's house.

Madame was waiting for them. "And this is Jerree," she said, "the Lyric Lunatic at Large!" He laughed at that. "Ah, you did not bring your funny little dog!"

"Oh, Willy's such a nuisance!"

"You are very ungrateful," laughed Madame. "You forgot that he brought you to me!" She led them through the house to a sheltered porch where they could watch the moon rise over the hills. Mentu-Hotep came too, and jumped into June's lap, landing like a ton of brick, and causing June to give an inelegant and involuntary grunt. But once there, he remained quiet, and seemed to be listening to the talk, purring comfortably.

Before long Jerry was telling some of his

experiences at college, including the almost disastrous one about the skeleton, and some of his adventures in selling soap. And Madame laughed more than once.

Once Jerry suggested that she tell of Russia. Madame was silent a moment, her face hidden in the shadows.

“Pardon, Jerree,” she said, presently. “Pardon if I do not, please? Let us be gay. Russia is — *hell* to me! I am not profane. I mean it. I suffered there — and I want to forget it. I hate it! No — let us be gay and tell each other more funny stories, yes?”

But somehow, instead of funny stories, they talked seriously of Madame’s work, and June and Jerry told her of their own ambitions, and then, somehow, none of them could quite remember afterward how it came about, they found themselves talking of pageants.

Madame told them of a group of girls at a community house in the city, and of her efforts in teaching them a little of the drama and coaching amateur plays and concerts and operettas.

“I like it,” she said, simply. “One girl I found with a remarkable voice. She is an



Italian girl. She is now studying. Some day she will sing in opera. I like girls — but they sadden me. Oh, not you, Girl with the Amber Eyes! You make me happy! But those others — I look among them for — I do not know what — but it is not there, and I am sad.”

And then gradually a plan for a pageant in the town came into being. The girls and men of the hotels — the summer guests — would be asked to take part, and Madame would sing. She would sing a group of songs while the girls and men would form tableaux in costume.

“Oh, it would be so easy! Costumes — French, Spanish, Russian — some painted scenery — That is all! And you shall be a gypsy group! Your father shall play some gypsy airs and I shall sing them, and you two shall be lovers by the fireside! Come inside.” She sprang up impulsively, and led the way inside again. “Wait!” She whirled up the stairway, leaving June and Jerry looking at each other.

“She’s a peach!” said Jerry, enthusiastically. “Say, the hotels ought to be glad to help us. Look at the trade it would bring. Madame

will draw people from miles around. In town they pay any price to hear her at her concerts!”

Before June could answer Madame was down again, holding something in her hands. It was a pair of earrings — dull gold carved into the shape of a half-opened flower, fully two inches across, with a yellow drop, pointed and cut like a prism. Madame fastened them in June’s ears with their tiny screws, and the points almost touched her shoulders.

“Is she not a little barbarian now?” Madame asked of Jerry, who was lost in amazement. “They match your eyes. Wear them often, will you not — I mean in the evenings, of course. They are your stones — amber and topazes, just as my stones are sapphires. Look in the mirror. Are they not lovely?”

“Oh,” breathed June. “They make me *different!*”

“I’ll say they do,” said Jerry.

Madame laughed. “Will not the girls envy you? I am giving them to you, child,” as June’s eyes were questioning.

“Oh, no,” protested June, quickly. “I couldn’t think of it — really — It is too much — My father would not like —”

“ Please! You are always making Olga Sergieff say ‘ please ’ to you, Girl with the Amber Eyes! They are nothing. Old peasant jewelry — gold, yes, and native handwork, but they are not amber drops, nor even topazes, child. Just glass. Some peasant girl wore them when she went to the village mosque to the Easter service, and they lay warm on her neck under her furs when she went through the deep snow to the Christmas service — perhaps in Moscow or old St. Petersburg! That is all. Take them. I could never wear them! They are yours! ”

June was puzzled. To be sure, Madame was giving them to her, and Madame was a woman who should know her own mind, even though she was impulsive. So she accepted them with as much grace as she could, rendered awkward by her embarrassment, privately deciding to ask her father's advice, and return them if he said to do so.

Madame considered it settled. She swept them into the music room and piled music before them. She sang some of the songs and translated the foreign words for them. And between the three of them they made up groups

of songs and planned the settings for quite a number of tableaux. Then Sonia came in with more Russian cookies and iced tea. And as they ate and drank they continued to talk of the pageant. Madame spoke to Sonia rapidly in Russian and Sonia's square face lit up, and she nodded, smilingly.

"Sonia approves of the plan," said Madame. "She knows she will have to help with the costumes, but she does not mind." Sonia shook her head and smiled again. "We can work up the pageant itself, and the advertising and the details and the hard part we shall leave to my press agent." She dismissed the matter with a wave of her hands. It was quite simple when one had a good press agent!

"Whew!" whistled Jerry as Madame's car left them at the door of the Mountain House. "She's a live wire, all right!"

"I feel guilty about these earrings, though," worried June.

"You look stunning in them, though. Maybe they're some of the crown jewels!"

"Oh, Jerry! Then I'd *have* to give them back!"

"Aw, shucks! I was just romancing! Of



course they're not. Hasn't she got lovely hair?"

"Beautiful. How old do you suppose she is? She can't be more than twenty, can she, even if her hair is white?"

"Get out! She told us it is thirteen years since she left Russia — in the middle of the upheaval, I gathered, didn't you? — and she must have been more than seven. She's about thirty-five, I should judge. Fully thirty-five." They went upstairs together. "Going to have breakfast with me to-morrow morning? Then you'll have to get up early, for I'm going to be first on deck when the dining-room door opens at eight o'clock, for an early start and round up some more soapless and hopeless cottagers!"

"I'll be there," June promised.

She switched on her light and looked at herself in the glass above her bureau. She made a ledge of her hands, and rested her chin on it. The topaz drops gleamed in the light as they swayed to and fro, and they matched her eyes, which seemed somehow to be longer, and slightly slanting upward at the corners, they melted into the soft tan of her cheeks, and harmonized with the coppery glints in her brown hair.

They added a dash, a trace of oriental mystery, to her face.

“ You don’t look like a little maid from school,” she told the reflection. “ You look like a woman in a novel — a — a woman of the world!” She took them off, rubbed her eyes, and she was again a sedate and demure maid from Miss Spencer’s Select!

## CHAPTER XVI

### ASHES OF MEMORIES

As Jerry predicted, the hotels took to the scheme eagerly. One of them even placed a large room at the disposal of Madame and her press agent, so that she could hold rehearsals and business interviews there instead of at her home. The summer guests at the hotels and cottages, too, were glad of the chance to help under the direction of the well-known singer. They were glad, even, of the chance to speak to her for a few moments and shake hands with her.

Madame wore her honors gracefully, accepting their homage, and being gracious to everyone, but reserving her sweetest smiles for June, who was her right-hand lady through it all.

On Friday morning they held the first real rehearsal, and it was a success. There were several girls and men at the various hotels who

had good speaking or singing voices, and the pageant grew to unthought-of proportions as opportunities were made for the really good talent.

The last enthusiastic “performer” had gone, and Madame and June remained in the big room which echoed hollowly to their voices and to Sonia’s footsteps as she moved about, picking up carelessly flung “props,” and keeping busy until the car should come for Madame.

Madame herself sank wearily into a big chair and June dropped at her feet and sat with her own feet curled under her, and her chin resting on the arm of Madame’s chair.

“I am so glad we thought of it,” said Madame, with a tired sigh, but her eyes sparkled. “It will be a beautiful thing when it is finished!”

June raised her eyes to the impromptu stage and nodded. The rehearsal had been rather sketchy — a few yards of cheesecloth and a few chairs being almost everything in the way of costuming and scenery — and it had been rather chaotic, but June’s artistic sense could see beauty in it when it was all straightened out, and every one knew exactly what to do without



having to try things several times. Madame was pleased and enthusiastic, and that was everything.

“And when am I to meet your father?”

“Oh, he is coming back to-night,” said June, happily. “I’ll bring him to-morrow, shall I?”

“To-morrow evening, then. I shall be away all day. Be sure to bring him then. I want him to try the violin accompaniments with me. He will be just as much of a drawing card as I am. Indeed my press agent tells me, confidentially, that his reputation is greater than mine.” She paused. “Do you think he’ll do it?”

“Oh, he will,” said June, confidently. “He’d do anything for me.”

“But it will mean staying longer at the hotel,” said Madame. “Perhaps he won’t want to do that. And he is a soloist and may object to playing even one accompaniment —”

“Oh, he’ll do it, Madame! Don’t worry about that! He’ll do anything for me!”

“Of course,” laughed Madame, giving her a little squeeze. “Who wouldn’t? — Does he look like you, June?”

“They say a little. He’s very good-looking.”

“Then of course he doesn’t.” Madame’s eyes crinkled at the corners and both she and June laughed. “I want to ask him a question — not about the pageant — when I see him. There are just you two, aren’t there?”

“Yes. Mother — ”

“You told me — and he is heartbroken.” Her blue eyes were suddenly sad. “Ah, it is terrible to lose one who is dear — I — I have lost every one, and everything. But he — even if he lost you, too, and his violin, would still have one precious thing which I have lost with the rest! June — one of these days I want to tell you something — something no one knows but Sonia and one other.” She looked into June’s upturned face, and her slender fingers slipped through June’s dark curls. Slender white fingers — dark brown hair — a square forehead with a straight hairline and a broad sweep of wave upward from it — Her hand dropped.

June, sensing a tension, looked up. “What is the matter, Madame?”

Madame was looking into the distance, with

a puzzled frown on her brow, and a look of pain in her eyes. She seemed to return to her surroundings slowly, looking at June for a moment before replying.

“ Why — why, nothing, June. Why? ”

“ You look pale — ”

Madame's hands were clenched tightly. She looked at them and unclenched them. She relaxed her tense body. She smiled a little.

“ Nothing at all, June. I am a creature of moods, I am afraid. Your hair reminds me of something — ”

She looked at Sonia and shook her head. Sonia's gray eyes were startled. She hurried over to Madame and seemed to hover over her protectingly.

Madame gathered her things together. “ Ah, there is Michael with the car. I can take you to your hotel, and drop you there. Sometime when we are sitting alone by the fireside, and the wind is howling outside, and the snow is drifting and the sleet is lashing the windows, I shall tell you — . Or sometime when we are sitting together in the moonlight with the scent of roses and honeysuckle making us yearn for something we have known and lost, I shall tell

you — the story of Olga Sergieff. Sometime when we are happy.”

The automatic man stood in the doorway, saluting gravely. June had a moment in which to tell Madame of her fancy that the man and his car were well-made automatic toys, and Madame's eyes lost their look of pain. She said something to the man in Russian, with a laugh. He started, looked slightly horrified, saluted, and laughed — actually tinnily!

Sometime when the wind was howling outside — Didn't Madame know that she would be going in just a short while? Of course not forever! Something inside June cried out in protest at the thought of that. Perhaps some winter evening in Madame's town house when June had a holiday or a week-end from school.

What was Madame's story? What made the laughter leave her blue velvet eyes, so that they became almost black with suffering? June shuddered at the thought of the terrible things she must have seen in Russia to sadden her whole life that way. And what did she mean by saying that Paul would still have one precious thing she had lost?

She spent the afternoon wondering about it,



and also wondering whether the mysterious music teacher was her mother after all. She was conscious of a little spark of hope that she would not be.

“Isn’t that mean of me?” she asked Jerry, after she had confessed it to him over the dinner table. “Somehow, I don’t want to meet her now. I guess that actress — Miss LaFitte — sort of disillusioned me — or — something. And Dad is just the kind who would — would stick to her after he found her, no matter what she was like. And, Jerry, I just couldn’t stand it if she weren’t some one simply wonderful!”

“She couldn’t help but be wonderful,” said Jerry soothingly.

“Why?” asked June. “What do you mean?”

“Think it over,” advised Jerry, solemnly, “and it will come to you.”

They went to meet the last train. June’s heart beat quickly. Suppose — suppose — he had a woman with him — ! But he was alone. He seemed surprised to see them.

“Why, Kid,” he said, “you didn’t have to wait up for me.”

“Oh, we have so much to tell you,” said June.

“ I couldn’t go to bed and wait until morning! ” Then she plunged into the middle of her story, and Paul listened, bewildered. He gathered that June had somehow (in some mysterious way involving a skunk and an Egyptian king) met Olga Sergieff, and was helping her to do something. It didn’t make sense at all.

“ And you will, won’t you? ” she finished.

“ Huh? ” Paul was more bewildered than ever. “ Where do I come in in this skunk-Russian-singer-Egyptian-king mix-up? ”

“ We want you to accompany us. ”

Paul shook his head, helplessly. “ June, have a heart. I have been traveling all day, and I’m a trifle more dense than usual. Wait until to-morrow morning, and ask me again. ”

June squeezed his arm and rubbed her cheek against it. She glanced toward Jerry’s dim figure. “ Dad,” she whispered. “ Was she? ”

“ No. ”

“ Oh, Dad! I’m sorry! You’re always being disappointed, aren’t you? ”

“ Seems that way, June. ”

She sighed. Then she smiled in the dark. “ I do want you to meet Madame! She’s a darling, isn’t she, Jerry? ”

"Who is?" asked Jerry. "I don't listen in on whispered conversations, and I don't go about admitting that anonymous females are darlings!"

"Isn't he a bear?" gurgled June. "Madame, of course!"

"Ah, that's different. Madame is — Madame!"

They had reached the porch of the hotel, and June surveyed her father in the light of the porch lantern. She noticed how tired he looked.

"Let's go right to bed. And don't sit up talking about things," said June, maternally.

Nevertheless, as soon as Paul and Jerry reached their room Paul turned to him with the demand: "What on earth is it all about?"

"It's too long a story to tell to-night," said Jerry.

"But, great Scott, if you don't tell me now I'll have a nightmare with Russian singers and skunks and Egyptian mummies running around in it. — What a combination of characters!"

"You've forgotten Willy," laughed Jerry. "He started it by chasing the skunk that was Mentu-Hotep, really."

“ For goodness’ sake! ” laughed Paul. “ Before I go completely goofy, tell me whom she expects me to accompany and where! ”

Jerry settled himself in an armchair and put his hands behind his head, settling comfortably down on his backbone. “ Any one who uses ‘ goofy ’ and ‘ whom ’ in the same sentence betrays his state of mind plainly. So I’d better tell you before you bite a piece out of the bed.” So he told the whole wild tale.

“ That’s June,” gasped Paul, smothering his laughter in a pillow. “ The minute I turn my back she’s into some wild adventure. And since she’s adopted Willy! ”

“ But wait until you see Madame! Temperamental as the deuce! ”

“ Most Russians are.”

“ But she isn’t Russian, I’ll bet a cookie! ”

“ No? ”

“ I’m positive she isn’t. Her accent — You can’t tell by that of course but — Well, if she’s Russian, I’m Chinese, that’s all! Anyway, she’s a peach, and she adores June.”

“ Don’t we all? ”

“ I’ll say we do! ” He surprised himself by the unexpected fervor in his tone, flushed, and



snapped out the light suddenly. Paul laughed softly.

“And so she’s dragged you over there every night,” said Paul, with seeming innocence.

“Oh, I didn’t have to be dragged,” protested Jerry, quickly, “I liked it!”

Paul laughed again, and a certain quality in the tone of his laugh told Jerry the query had not been entirely guileless after all.

“You’re a good scout, Jerry,” said Paul.

Jerry stared at a square of moonlight. He and the daughter of the great Paul Severne — And if Paul had been displeased he would hardly have laughed — or opened the subject at all in quite that way. — June at the Thanksgiving Day game, and at the dance following it — wearing her amber earrings!

“Madame’s given June the stunningest pair of amber earrings — Russian antiques — She looks like Cleopatra in them.”

“June and the moonlight make a wicked combination,” said Paul, solemnly, but with a shake of laughter in his voice. “You’d better get some sleep, son.”

But for a long time after Jerry’s rhythmic breathing told he was sleeping, Paul lay awake,

thinking of college days, of a girl with golden hair and blue eyes. Even the crickets chirping outside the window reminded him of their first summer's camping — and Olive.

The romance of his youth was dead, vanished, leaving only ashes of memories. He had June to think of now. Olive must go. Perhaps Olive did not need him now, but June certainly did.

There was an ache of loneliness in his heart. Paul Severne — the great Paul Severne — was envying Jerry Laughton, the humble, self-styled, “Ambassador to the Great Unwashed” — envying him because he was young, and happy, and in love.

And after a while he slept to dream of a skunk named Anatol, that had blue eyes and danced at a college prom with an Egyptian mummy named Mentu-Hotep, while Willy ran around saying “Wuf!” and wearing a pair of amber earrings.

## CHAPTER XVII

### *ÉLÉGIE*

The next morning June and Paul and Willy went for a long tramp through the woods, past the hidden lake, and turned aside here and there to follow the sound of hidden cascades, and paused to exclaim at the sudden wonder of the ghostly Indian pipe. All around them lay the dim aisles of the woods, piny, and comparatively free from undergrowth, and moist and mossy where hidden springs gushed forth suddenly. They went for the most part silently, their footsteps muffled by the soft needles beneath their feet.

Willy curbed his exploring tendencies, approaching holes with raised ruff, and a comical readiness for instant retreat. A scurrying chipmunk raised him to the highest pitch of delirious delight, but June's hand was firm on the leash, and the chipmunk was swift on his

feet, so the furry morsel escaped to chatter derisively from a mossy tree trunk across the trail.

They had been gradually ascending all morning, and at noon they reached the top of the mountain and the panorama of valley lay before them. They had brought their lunches, and Paul kindled a fire to heat coffee and toast sandwiches, while June watched the shadows of the clouds scurrying across the valley and hills.

The surrounding country-side was laid out in irregular patches of dark green woods, bright green of fields, a dozen different shades of green and yellow and brown, with a bright blue and silver patch which was the lake. It lay like a gigantic patchwork quilt spread over the rather bumpy form of a slumbering giant.

“I came to a sudden decision last night,” said Paul suddenly.

“Did you?” June smiled to herself about the conceit of the giant’s quilt, and answered rather absently.

“I decided that it is not fair to you for us to wander around this way. It takes you from your friends, and keeps you from making more.” He looked at her directly. “Tell me,



June, how many of your school friends invited you to spend the summer with them? ”

She hesitated. “ Di and Cathie and Mary did. — At camp and in Canada and the shore.”

“ You could have divided your vacation among them and had a great time. Didn't you want to? ”

“ Y-yes. I did,” honestly. “ But I couldn't dream of it! You're all I have and — I *do* enjoy gypsying with you.”

“ Better than camp and mountains and shores with a bunch of young girls and boys? — Well, anyway, this summer will be the last unless we take week-end trips or something. We'll take an apartment somewhere — wherever you say — and have the place full of your friends from June to October. How's that? ”

“ Oh, that would be fun! But you know I wouldn't go away and leave you all summer! I wouldn't do that, no matter how many invitations I had — not unless we lived together *all* the time.”

“ And we couldn't do that very well, with my concert tours. — But what I was going to say is — I've given up the idea of hunting any farther for your mother.”

“Dad! But why?”

“Well — for various reasons. It’s fifteen years since she — disappeared. Things can have happened in between. She may be married again — she may be so changed that her presence in my — our home — would be an embarrassment to you and to me. I have changed, and it is only fair to suppose that she has changed likewise. And another thing — That talk we had about the boys you met in the theatre lobby went a great deal deeper than you thought it would — too deep for comfort, in fact. It showed me that I had been chasing rainbows and neglecting you — ”

“Oh, Dad! You’ve been most generous and thoughtful. All the girls envy me the allowance you send me and the gifts and — ”

“But that’s not everything, Kid.”

“No,” in a small voice.

“And the things you’ve needed most I haven’t given you — ”

“No,” in a smaller voice.

“You see? I could have lost you quite easily — if I haven’t already.”

“Oh, you haven’t, Dad. This summer has brought us so wonderfully close together.”

“Has it, Kid? I’m glad. One of these days you’re going to fall in love and marry, and then — I’ll be your famous father miles away somewhere — or — your confidant and friend. And there will be two of us miles apart, or two of us very close together.”

“We’ll be close together, Dad, always. And if I ever do fall in love I’ll tell you all about it. I promise and then there’ll be three of us! — Willy, *don’t* lick my chin!

“Then you won’t mind staying for the pageant? And you will play Madame’s accompaniments?”

“That last is a little out of my line, June — But I’ll do it,” he added, hastily.

“And you won’t be sorry! Just wait until you see her!”

“With you and Jerry raving about her, you stir my curiosity! There’s just one other lady Jerry raves about — ”

“Does he?” Then she bit her lip in vexation.

“A certain person who looks like Cleopatra in amber earrings.” He ran his finger along Willy’s back and Willy wiggled his spine.

June laughed. “Did he tell you about those

earrings? Oh, Dad, you should see them! I want to wear them in the pageant and knock everybody for a row of tombstones! — But Madame is a dear, really. And Mentu-Hotep is priceless! Willy chases him and then Mentu-Hotep gets on to a chair or table and pats him benevolently on the head. Willy gets furious!”

“Wuf!” said Willy.

“And you’ll like Sonia, too. She’s just like a feather bed, with a shrill voice, and I never heard any one talk so fast in any language as she does in Russian!”

“A feather bed with a shrill voice would be a curiosity,” laughed Paul. “G’way, Willy! This pup has a perfect mania for licking people’s chins!”

“Usually Jerry’s. Jerry says he must have the chin he loves to touch. Do you suppose you’re fooling Willy into believing that’s a flea ambling down his back that way?”

“You never can tell what Willy’s believing, June. He’s a pretty wise dog. — There, the fire’s out. Let’s start back, shall we? I’d better take Willy’s leash, for he won’t be easy to hold going down hill.”



In the evening June and Paul and Jerry went to see Madame.

Madame was dressing, Sonia said, and asked June to come upstairs to her room, leaving Paul and Jerry in the music room.

Madame was profuse in her apologies. "I was late," she said. "It took me longer than I expected, and I have hurried, oh, so fast!"

"You needn't have hurried for us," said June.

Sonia busied herself helping Madame with her hair, and June sat in a low chair and looked on, marvelling at the deftness of Sonia's clumsy-looking hands.

"Did you bring your father?" asked Madame. "Is it all right?"

June nodded.

At last Madame was arrayed in a cornflower blue gown, with silver slippers, a silver band in her hair, and a sapphire ring on one hand. She looked rather tired and wan, so she touched her cheeks lightly with rouge. Sonia said something to her, and Madame smiled.

"What a tyrant she is! She says I must rest for fifteen minutes. — I do feel tired." She relaxed again in her chair and closed her eyes.

Up from the music room floated a strain of music. Paul had found it impossible to resist the lure of the music-room, and was playing softly — Massenet's *Élégie* again. And there was a quality in it which June had never heard before. The violin sobbed its yearning. The music soared to the highest ecstasy of agony, dropped to the breathless sobbing of spent grief, and through it all one could feel the soul throbbing and quivering with anguish.

Madame drew in a sudden sharp breath. The music quieted, became smoother; the turbulent spirit was calmed and resigned to its bereavement; died to a low breath, a hovering over sad memories. Madame's eyes were wide, and her lips parted. She was looking away into space. Sonia put her finger to her lips warning June to be still.

"Ah!" cried Madame, sharply. "I see — a pine-tree — mists swirling around it — evening mists — a camp fire and across its glow — across —" She closed her eyes, and frowned. Her whole form became tense. "There is some one else — I can't remember — I can't remember any more. Help me! Help me to remember!" Still Sonia remained quiet,

watching. The blue eyes opened. They were almost black with suffering. Her slim white hands were twisted together, and her breath came in deep sobs, like that of one in physical pain. Then she relaxed with a tired sigh. "I cannot," she murmured. "I cannot — think — remember. — I have a headache." She pushed back her hair from her forehead, and closed her eyes for a moment, and lines of pain showed around her mouth.

"Madame is not well," whispered Sonia.

"We will go, then," said June, softly, but Madame heard.

"I am all right — only tired. I shall go down with you and meet your father and then — he will excuse me — perhaps — if I do not sing."

"Rest a while," said Sonia, and added a few words in Russian, words with a crooning lilt to them, and Madame lay back passively while Sonia smoothed her forehead.

"Let us go down," said Madame in a few minutes. She said it calmly and smiled, but there were still marks of suffering in her face, pale beneath the dash of rouge.

They went down slowly. The living-room

was dark, but the music-room was lighted warmly with a rosy-shaded lamp by the piano. Paul stood in the glow of it, his face sharply silhouetted against the shade, while he bent over some music. Madame saw his profile and drew back.

“No,” she breathed, hanging back like a child. “No. I do not want to. I will not. I do not want to meet him!” She turned to June. “I cannot,” piteously. “Do not make me. June —” She crumpled suddenly into Sonia’s strong arms.

“Come up in a little while,” said Sonia, and carried her mistress’ limp form upstairs.

June stood for a moment shocked and undecided what she should do. Then she went to Paul and Jerry and told them what had happened. “I think she is over-tired,” she said. “She isn’t very strong, and perhaps there has been some emotional strain. Sonia wants me to go up. Will you wait for me?” They nodded.

For a while after June had gone Paul turned the leaves of music, but Jerry could see that he turned them absently.

“I think I have heard Madame’s voice —



met her, perhaps. Of course just now her voice was strained and lower-pitched than an ordinary talking voice would be. But still — What is she like? Tall? Brown eyes? ”

“ No. Little, white-haired, but young, and with eyes like blue velvet, as June expresses it.”

Paul stood for a moment, deep in thought, then he reached for the telephone which stood handily to the piano.

June closed the bedroom door softly. Sonia sat in a rocking chair with Madame in her arms, and she was crooning to her — not in Russian, June noticed, but in broken English.

Madame looked up.

“ Do not let him come up! ” she whispered, her eyes wide and frightened. “ Do not let him come, June.”

“ He weell not,” said Sonia. “ Do not be ’fraid, Leetle One. He weell stay — downstairs — ”

“ Why, of course,” said June. “ Dad wouldn’t come up here.”

Madame looked at her uncertainly. “ Of course not,” she said with a little sigh. “ This is not Russia — ”

“ Do not try to remember,” said Sonia.

“ Forget — forget — everyt’ing. It is not — not good to remember — too mooch. Sleep. Sonia weell sing.”

“ I do not have to see him, do I? ” begged Madame, looking at June pleadingly. “ Do not say I have to meet that man — ”

“ Why — why — no,” stammered June. “ Not if you don’t want to — ” What was there about her handsome, distinguished-looking father which repelled Madame so strongly? “ I’m sorry you don’t like him — ”

“ I don’t know,” said Madame, wearily. “ But — it does things to me — here,” touching her heart.

“ Can’t I get you something? ” asked June helplessly. “ Some smelling-salts or — or — something? ”

Sonia shook her head. “ Eet is not that kind,” she said. “ Leetle One, do not — do not.”

Madame did not answer. She looked before her with the intensive gaze of one thinking very hard, oblivious to her surroundings. Sonia continued to rock and to croon. June watched with fascinated eyes.

Perhaps fifteen minutes passed, then

Madame sighed, like one awaking from sleep. "I cannot think," she whispered. "I cannot — remember —" Then she hid her face in Sonia's ample bosom and sobbed, great, form-racking sobs, and Sonia held her until she became calmer, then she picked her up and laid her on her bed. Madame lay there quietly, an occasional shudder running through her frame. She turned her head and smiled weakly.

"Did I frighten you, June?" she asked. "I am all right now. You look pale and terrified, child."

June came towards the bed and knelt beside her. "Oh, you *did* frighten me," she said.

Madame's hand gripped hers weakly, but warmly. "To-morrow I'll tell you — about it. Tell your father — I am — too ashamed — but —"

"Don't think about it," said June, soothingly. "If you want to tell me to-morrow —"

"I do! I've wanted to tell you ever since you came."

Sonia stood at the doorway, and embraced June with the same all-enfolding, all-engulfing embrace as that of a feather bed, and the tears ran down her quivering face.

Downstairs Paul was talking over the telephone. "Well, it's about time! Is Max Hershfield there?"

The answer came back cautiously. "Mr. Hershfield? Who is deese? I tell him you called."

"This is Paul Severne —"

"Oy-oy! Sure! Vait, vonce, Mr. Severne. Deese is Mr. Hershfield himselluf! You vant-it I should — Sure, I got-it just der place for you —"

"No, no, Max. I'm sewn up tight. It's not that. Say, Max, I want to ask you about Olga Sergieff. What's her story?"

"She vas a Rooshian — a vat-you-call refugee —"

"Yes, yes, I know, Max. What's her real story?"

There was a little silence, a pregnant silence. "Dot is her story. *Aber* — To you, Mr. Severne, if you should come to mein offitz tomorrow mornink, Mr. Severne, I should maybe tell you sometings difference — Ah?"

"I'll be there, Max."



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE STORY OF OLGA SERGIEFF

With Jerry off somewhere selling soap, and Paul called away on a sudden business appointment, June felt very much alone, so she took Willy with her when she went to call upon Madame. And to relieve Mrs. Watson's mind she said she didn't expect to be back for luncheon. She had puzzled all night about the strange occurrence at Madame's, for she felt that there was more to it than just nerves or temperament. There was some mystery about Madame, and perhaps it would be explained.

It was rather funny, too, the way men reacted to a thing like that. Jerry was frankly panic-stricken, and Paul was moody — not hurt, apparently, or resentful, but just silent. He said hardly anything at breakfast, either. But then it was rather hard on him, accustomed

as he was to applause and admiration, to overhear a woman go into hysterics rather than meet him. In a way it had its funny aspects, too, although of course it was terribly tragic for Madame.

Madame was reclining in a chaise longue which had been brought out into the rose garden. She looked pale and tired, and there were dark rings around her eyes. Her expression lightened, however, when she saw June with Willy tugging at the leash, and she sat up and leaned on one elbow.

“ Oh, you have brought your so funny little dog again! ” she cried.

Mentu-Hotep purred in a rumbling bass voice, curled up beside his mistress. At the sound of her voice he opened his topaz eyes, stretched out a monstrous paw, unsheathed his curved claws and regarded them lovingly, then drew his paw back and curling it about his nose went to sleep registering supreme contempt for anything so negligible as an adventure hound.

“ I am so afraid I frightened you last night, ” said Madame, throwing a bright, fat cushion to the grass for June to sit upon. “ I don’t know what your father must have thought of

me. I hope he thought of me as temperamental or unstrung rather than rude — ”

“ Dad understands,” said June, “ and when a thing isn’t understandable he understands all the better — if you know what I mean.”

“ I think I do,” said Madame. “ You love your father, don’t you? ”

“ More than all the world. You see he’s all I’ve got.”

“ Yes. — And now I can’t ask him the favor I wanted to ask — ”

“ About the accompaniments? That will be all right. I asked him last night and he said ‘ uh-huh.’ ”

“ No, it was something else — Well — sit down, June.”

June dropped to the cushion and drew Willy into her arms. Madame’s frail white fingers played with a blade of grass for a moment. “ I promised to tell you — ”

“ Don’t if you’d rather not,” said June.

“ But I want to. It is something only one other person knows — beside Sonia. It will help you to understand — perhaps — I don’t quite understand myself. — I — I am not Russian, June.”

“ I thought not, but then lots of singers, Dad says, take foreign names — ”

“ Yes, but that is not my reason.

“ Fourteen years ago, I awoke one morning in the home of a Russian peasant. Imagine, if you can, awaking to-morrow morning and finding yourself in a home in a foreign country, with all your associates speaking a language you could not understand. Imagine remembering nothing of what had happened before you awoke — who you were, or how you came there, or who those people were! I tried that first morning, to remember who I was, and I think I nearly went crazy. But I could not remember anything at all!

“ The family crowded around me and asked me questions which I could not understand, but there was no misunderstanding their joy that I had ‘ come back.’

“ It was winter, and we were hemmed into the house. I had plenty of time to think, and when I was tired with trying to remember I watched the family. Sonia was the mother. There was a giant of a man, her husband, and two burly sons, one of them married to a lovely little girl



who had a baby. The girl sang lullabies to the baby before the fire and I watched and learned some of the songs. I sang to forget, and to try to remember. My songs were all I could remember. They kept me sane, I think.

“It was bitterly cold and I was kept well wrapped in warm rugs and fed quantities of hot tea and soup with rich sour cream in it. I began to learn their language.

“Down in the village was a well-educated priest who kept the school. He came up to see me. I think Sonia must have told him about me, for he came in and looked at me kindly. Then he spoke to me. I did not understand. Then he spoke in English, and my heart gave a great leap. I knew that was my language, and I answered him, asking questions so fast that he put his hands over his ears and his teeth made a white line in the midst of his black beard, and the whole family crowding around us shouted with glee. Even the baby pounded his mother in the face with a spoon and crowed.

“‘You are English!’ he cried.

“‘English!’ they shouted and clapped their hands.

“From that time on the priest came every

day, and taught me Russian and said things to me to keep my courage up. I learned that I had been found by one of the sons, half-frozen on the windswept steppe, a long time before — several months before — and I had remained in a daze. I was like one, the priest said, who had had a great shock.

“ He told me things about Russia, too, and the great war which was going on. England and Germany — all the civilized world in fact, were fighting. It seemed incredible.

“ I like to remember those snow-bound days in that Russian home. There were peace and good will, laughter and love. But when I think of Russia, I do not recall those days but something vastly different. Something horrible —

“ News began to come to us through foreign newspapers smuggled to us, about the certain defeat of the allies. We learned that the old régime had been overthrown, that the people had taken possession and were destroying the czar’s palace and everything that symbolized culture. The Czar and his family had been put to death. The priest was indignant — Then came a day — ”

Madame shuddered and covered her face with her hands, and remained there for a moment. When she looked up again her face was gray and drawn and her eyes were full of pain.

“ I cannot tell you about that day. It is too, too horrible. I awake sometimes and see dripping swords, and crimson-dropping knouts — the village kiosk in flames — the priest's school burned to ashes — the priest himself —. Ah, it is too horrible. I scream sometimes in the night, and Sonia comes and holds me. Ah, Sonia's price is above rubies! I would not tell you of the terrible things I saw — they would give you nightmares, just to hear of them.

“ When it was all over there were just two of us left — Sonia and I. Sonia's stalwart sons were killed, her husband also. And her daughter and her baby —

“ It is a terrible thing to see a whole nation gone mad — crazed with the lust for killing!

“ Sonia and I wrapped ourselves well in our thick furs and slipped away in the night and walked and walked and walked. Sonia was stronger than I, in spite of her bereavement, and she made arrangements for us to ride in farm-

ers' carts. We rode for miles and miles over frozen steppes, saying not a word to each other, nor to the man who brought us.

"I do not know much about it. My mind was too numbed with grief and horror to register correctly. I only know that we finally reached a town on the coast, and there in the square I saw a dingy house with a flag above it. It was an American flag, and it flew above the office of the American consul. He had his bags all packed ready to leave on a ship which sailed in half an hour, and he took Sonia and me with him.

"More nightmares of pitching seas, icy decks, biting winds and seasickness, and dark nights running in constant fear of U-boats.

"Finally we reached the coast of France. There we changed vessels.

" 'We're not at the end of our journey,' said the Consul, as I would have said good-bye to him at the dock. 'We'll be shipmates for a long time yet. We sail to-morrow for good old New York.'

" 'New York?' I said, and my heart gave a sudden little leap. " 'But I am English, am I not?'



“ I had told him my story at once before even leaving Russia and he had advised me to keep up my rôle of a mysterious Russian woman and say nothing to any one — an easy thing to do as I was deathly sick all the way to France.

“ He laughed. ‘ English!’ he said, ‘ Why, you’re as American as — as — scrapple!’

“ ‘ How do you know?’ I asked.

“ ‘ You say *trolley* for *tram*, and you say *spigot* for *tap*, and you say *extr’ordinary* instead of *extrawd’n’ry* —’

“ ‘ That’s enough,’ I said.

“ ‘ But still,’ he went on, ‘ it would be safer for you to adopt a Russian name.’

“ In my pocket when I was found half-frozen on the steppe was a scrap of an envelope, badly blurred and worn by friction of the lining of my pocket, and almost indecipherable. It looked like ‘ Olga Sergieff.’ At least that name was as good as any other for purposes of identification, and of disguise. When I arrived in America, I could either find my own name or adopt another more American one.

“ Well, even as bad a sailor as I am can’t stay seasick forever, and even waiting for an attack by a U-boat becomes monotonous after a cer-

tain length of time. So we had to amuse ourselves somehow. We worked up an informal concert and I agreed to sing some Russian lullabies and love songs which I had learned from Sonia. I received a number of encores, and after the concert was over a little round man, chewing a big, fat cigar, came to me and asked me if I would consider a theatrical career under his management. He was Max Hershfield — as fine and sympathetic and square a man as I have ever known. Because he was so sure that I was really some famous concert singer incog. I told him my story, and he almost wept when I finished.

“ ‘ You should put yourself in my hands,’ he said. ‘ What can you do when you get to New York. Without friends, family, a name even, and with no money!’ ”

“ I saw reason in his arguments and I accepted his offer, gratefully. I have been with him ever since.

“ In New York I went to a doctor who told me that I was doing wisely in taking up what had evidently been my former profession, as in that way I might come across people who had known me and would recognize me, and by keep-

ing occupied and happy my memory might gradually return.

“ The name Olga Sergieff carried a romantic air, and bore out the story Max and his press agent had worked up — and truthfully as far as it went — about my being a Russian refugee.

“ So here I am, still Olga Sergieff. Sometimes, as last night, it seems as though a curtain lifts just for a second and I see something — last night a pine-tree, a camp fire, and evening mists — sometimes an old-fashioned cradle and a baby in it.”

Madame rose suddenly and flung out her arms.

“ You cannot know! It is torment! To lose everything and every one and not to know — a husband — children — ? Who knows? The tragic part of it is that I know — I am sure — I had both and yet I cannot remember their names, nor how they looked. I could meet them and not know them. Parents, brothers, sisters — if I had them, they are gone. Sonia has lost her dear ones, but she has her memories. Your father has lost his wife, but he remembers her. He can recall incidents of his courtship, of his honeymoon, of his sweet companionship

with her. As the song says, they are memories that 'bless and burn,' but, Oh, June, they bless!"

"But can't something be done?" asked June.

"I'm doing all I can. If I had the strength, perhaps more music like last night would open the gate of memory a little more, but I could not stand it. To think and think — to strive to remember something that just eludes the grasp —

"My hair has been snow-white ever since I — awoke. But I am young. My physician said not more than forty at the very most.

"So you see, June, child. I have the things you want — money, a home, Sonia to love me, a career, fame but — Ah, well, who in this world has everything? You have your youth, friends, your father, your whole life before you —

"Was your father very angry last night — or hurt? Would he forgive at least enough to play your group of gypsy songs?"

"I am sure he would."

"And would he mind if I don't see him? One time," went on Madame, dreamily, "I



went to hear him play. I got as far as the lobby of the concert hall and saw a full-size portrait of him. I would not go in. He made the shivers go down my back."

"Dad is very good-looking," said June, stiffly. "And most women like him. He doesn't tell me, of course, but I can see it, and I know that I could have had several step-mothers —"

Madame dropped to her knees on the grass beside June and took her in her arms. "Of course he is," she laughed. "I do not mean that at all. That is why my feeling for him is so strange. Perhaps we are not spiritually attuned. Perhaps his aura is pink and mine is a particularly clashing shade of blue or something!" Her arms tightened suddenly. "June — Do you know why I went to those settlements — why I had those girls' clubs? I was looking for a girl — to adopt — to give a home and everything her heart desires. None of them appealed to me. You do. Will you come and live with me, June?"

June drew back startled. Madame's eyes were glowing like sapphires. "I — Why, I couldn't leave Dad, Madame — I —"

“Does your father really care for you?”

“Why, certainly! He’s my father! I am all he has! No matter how much I love you — and I do, Madame, more than any one I ever knew! — I couldn’t do that!”

Madame sighed. “I — I suppose not.”

Sonia descended upon them gesticulating and talking rapid Russian. Madame arose and laughed.

“She says I must not kneel on the grass. She is a terrible tyrant. Furthermore, luncheon is ready — luncheon for two.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE HEELS OF NICODEMUS

“ Hasn’t Dad come back yet? ” June perched on the porch railing of the Mountain House and swung one foot.

Jerry settled himself farther on his backbone in a creaky wicker rocker. “ No. He’s due any minute now.”

“ Where did he go? ”

“ He went to town to see Max Hershfield.” Jerry grinned involuntarily as he thought of the use he had made of the manager’s name when he first met Paul. It was purely a reminiscent grin, but June misinterpreted it.

“ Oh, he hasn’t! Has he, honestly? What for? ”

“ He didn’t tell me,” Jerry evaded, truthfully. “ Why does one usually see managers? ”

“ You’re sure he isn’t on the trail of another woman? ”

Jerry pretended to be shocked. "Is that the way to talk about your revered parent?"

"Well, I didn't mean it quite the way it sounded," she giggled. "He says he isn't going to look for Mother any more — but I don't think he meant it." She looked at him suspiciously. He looked just a trifle too innocent. "Do you know anything at all?"

"A few things," modestly.

"Silly! I mean where he's gone and why?"

"June, I did happen to overhear his end of a 'phone conversation. You wouldn't want me to repeat it, would you? He hasn't talked it over with me, and evidently he hasn't told you. Don't you think if he wanted us to know he would have told us?"

"All right, Jerry. You win the flannel ice-pick. Of course I could make you tell me — Oh, yes, I could, too! — but I won't tempt you. Madame told me her story to-day."

"Did she?" with a shade too much of eagerness.

June looked at him speculatively. "But I can't tell you — only — she isn't Russian, Jerry."

"No."



"And do you know what, Jerry? She wants me to come and live with her."

"*What?*"

"M-mm. She wanted me to leave Dad! Imagine that!"

"Did you want to?"

"Of course not! Leave Dad? Well, I should say not! — Funny how she acted about Dad, wasn't it? She seemed to hate the sight of him."

"I wonder. — June, did you tell her about your mother and your father's search for her?"

"No. Of course not. Why?"

"Oh, I just wondered."

The arrival of Paul right at that moment was a distinct relief to Jerry.

"Where have you been?" demanded June, sternly.

He laughed at her, but he had something of the guilty expression of a boy caught in the jam closet. "I went to see two people — Max Hershfield, and Dr. Leopold."

"Who's Dr. Leopold?" asked June. "Aren't you well, Dad?"

"Dr. Leopold is a noted psychiatrist — I think that's the thing you call him." Paul's

face was grave, but there was a twinkle in his eye.

“Who’s cuckoo?” asked June, flippantly. “You or I? Or are we suspecting Jerry again?”

Paul laughed. June didn’t believe the psychiatrist part of it, and Paul knew she didn’t, but Jerry did, and his eyes grew as round as saucers.

“We’ll have to get to work on our part of the pageant,” said Paul, seriously. “We haven’t much time, and it will be a little elaborate, although Max is getting the scenery for us. We’ve got to get a painted cart from somewhere, and a donkey, and then we’ll be all set. Max will give us all the costumes we need.”

“You seem to have a pull,” laughed June.

Jerry laughed. “Your father’s famous enough to have a pull with any manager, June.”

Paul looked at them severely, his pencil poised above a notebook. “When you children are through with your frivolity, we’ll proceed. To begin with, I don’t want Madame to see any rehearsals of this part of the pageant. Do you think that can be arranged?”

"If you take charge of it, I think so," said June.

"And I don't want her to see me again until the night of the performance."

"Why?"

"Because I ask it, June."

"'Scuse me, Dad."

"You'll not have anything to say or sing. But you might ask Madame if she knows this little Provençal lullaby. I'll write the name for you. If she does, she might sing that when she hears the opening bars of it."

"You're not peeved at Madame, are you?" ventured June.

"Peeved?"

"She was afraid you might be, and she doesn't want you to be. She — she doesn't dislike you — really —"

"Doesn't she?"

June frowned. Paul was acting just as he used to act in the years before he told her about her mother. She felt a little rebuffed.

They located a gaily-painted cart, and Hershfield succeeded in renting a donkey from a children's park. And the rehearsals went on.

If Madame was curious about June's part

in the program, she made no sign. She was completely satisfied to leave the direction of it in Paul's hands, with June's assurance that it harmonized with the rest of the pageant. Nor did she make any attempt to see him again.

The day of the performance seemed about two hours long to June. It was packed full of last-minute details. All the morning she helped Madame with odds and ends, the trifling details which take so much time after everything is supposed to be finished, and she went with her to view the enormous stage which was being erected in one end of the great field where the pageant was to be held. It was going to be splendid, June decided.

Shortly before noon Hershfield and Dr. Leopold arrived with Nicodemus, the donkey. Nicodemus was a mousy-gray color, with a meek expression and floppy gray plush ears. Willy gave him one look and became his bitterest enemy. In his doggy mind was implanted the conviction that this strange animal with ears like a rabbit was his rival for June's affections. He circled about the slim hoofs and looked into the meek face, decided the creature was harmless, and gave a sudden explosive



bark. Nicodemus went straight up for a distance of about six inches, and landed with all four feet close together, one ear pointing south and the other northeast, and with such a comical expression of startled surprise on his face that June and Paul laughed aloud.

Willy felt quite proud of himself. This was a new kind of game, almost as much fun as chasing Mentu-Hotep! He did it again, but this time Nicodemus was prepared, and let loose a swift kick that just missed Willy by a whisker. Willy's ruff stood up. He bristled with wrath. He made the barnyard ring with his yelps and growls, while Nicodemus stood calmly and apparently went to sleep, now and then wagging an ear, but not to be tempted into showing all his tricks at once.

But Willy had learned to beware of those sharp hoofs. They took Nicodemus away, and June carried Willy with her to the porch, where she soothed his wounded feelings.

Max Hershfield was there, a little round figure of a man, with a big, black, much-chewed cigar between his full lips. With him was a polished gentleman of typically professional aspect, with iron-gray hair, iron-gray goatee,

and piercing black eyes. June was not surprised to learn that the latter was Dr. Leopold, but she wondered just why he was there. He seemed too professional in his bearing to be there just as a friend.

But she had little time to think of the matter, for they had to examine the costumes and scenery and go through a hasty dress rehearsal.

The evening was warm and clear. The moon had waned, but there were plenty of lights — electric bulbs strung on wires, and Chinese lanterns. Dusk had hardly fallen before groups began sauntering into the grounds, finding seats or walking about. Children ran about among them, playing tag with shrill whoops and getting into every one's way, but treated with good-natured tolerance typical of Americans in a holiday mood. There were women in evening gowns covered with silken shawls or light wraps. Others wore sport clothes. There were men in full dress and in knickers. Over all hovered a cloud of cigarette smoke, not stuffy, as it would be in a room, but aromatic, like an incense to the god of pleasure. The air tingled with excitement.

The pageant went well. Madame was at

her best, and Paul, from behind the scenes, played those accompaniments which she had specified. There was a group of Irish songs, with a colleen and a boy in costume, acting the parts. There were some simple English songs, some Fourteenth Century French ones, some children's play songs, some old folk songs. Some were sung by Madame, and some by the actors. There was a very clever Spanish dancer who was well received. She was a find, Madame had said at rehearsals.

Then the curtain fell and June and Jerry hurried back of the stage to be in their places. The men worked swiftly, setting up the scene. A boy was entrusted with Willy, who had been taking an active interest in the proceedings. Nicodemus was coaxed up an incline to the stage, June and Jerry took their places, and the curtain rose again.

The scene was elaborate and brought a pleased gasp from the great audience, followed by enthusiastic applause. In the background was a tower with a pointed roof, and leading to it was a cobbled street, and to the right a hint of water and a row of trees. It was marvelously well painted.

In the foreground was a camp fire with June on one side of it and Jerry on the other. And behind them was the painted wagon with Nicodemus tethered near by. June wore a full skirt of deep yellow, with a bodice of black, heavily embroidered in bright colors, and she wore her amber earrings. Jerry was resplendent in a white silk shirt with flowing sleeves, and an embroidered waistcoat, and a bright red sash. He looked very dashing, but said that he felt foolish.

June thought the songs Paul had suggested were rather unusual, and she did not quite understand their significance, but the audience saw nothing incongruous in them. When Paul played Massenet's *Élégie*, two of Hershfield's men worked the lights so that the stage darkened to the thick purple of midnight, showing up the tiny silver stars around the point of the tower, and the silver spangles on the water, and the glowing rubies of the camp fire.

June had been a trifle apprehensive of *Élégie*, but Madame was not affected this time. She was very pale, June noticed, and steadfastly refused to look in Paul's direction. His presence was evidently a strain upon her nerves,



but her professional training carried her through without mishap.

Hershfield sat in a front seat chewing his cigar into shreds, and wriggling in his seat, but beaming through it all. Dr. Leopold sat quietly, perhaps enjoying it, perhaps bored, but betraying no sign of emotion at all.

The Provençal lullaby was well received, and then Paul played a wild air, which June had never remembered hearing before.

It seemed to screech defiance, to rumble threats, and then swung into a stirring march with an undercurrent of little running tunes. Not one of the audience failed to grasp the fact that it was a war song. The stage was completely dark now, except for the handful of embers in the camp fire. Then very softly, growing louder, and louder Paul began *La Marseillaise*, and Madame sang it. At the end, the curtain fell.

The applause was so loud and prolonged that Paul signaled to June and Jerry to stay where they were, and the curtain rose again. It was the end of the pageant, and the audience was insistent that Paul and Madame appear. So with Paul on one end, June and Jerry in the

middle and Madame on the other, they appeared before the curtain. Then they stood there alone.

Madame looked straight before her with her set, professional smile on her pale face, but Paul looked at her.

"Thank you," she murmured, without the slightest glance at him, and left him.

Paul and Dr. Leopold exchanged glances, then Paul turned and went back stage.

Back stage was the usual excitement, and added to it was another disturbing element. A small bunch of fur flung itself through the curtains, propelled by a veritable frenzy of jealousy. It hurled itself viciously at Nicodemus who was dozing peacefully by the camp fire, and gave a shrill yap, half yelp and half snarl.

Nicodemus went up as if on springs, came down and kicked with both heels sending a shower of red embers into a mass of scattered excelsior. Before it dawned on the laughing bystanders that something serious was happening, the excelsior was ablaze and before extinguishers could be reached and operated, flames were licking the painted scene.

In an instant every one was busily carrying

scenery out of harm's way, knowing it was too late to save the tower, which was blazing. Madame came back stage and stopped aghast.

She looked at the burning tower — the cobbled street leading to it — the painted canal and the willows beside it, and her eyes widened in horror.

In one bound she had crossed the stage and grasped Paul by the arm. She screamed, and the scream brought Hershfield and Dr. Leopold.

Paul looked down at her, and her blue eyes met his squarely.

“It's on fire!” she panted. “Puck! We've left June in there!”

Then she swayed and crumpled up in a little heap on the grass.



THEN SHE CRUMPLED UP IN A LITTTT HEAP ON THE GRASS.

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## CHAPTER XX

### OUT OF THE MIST

Of them all, Dr. Leopold was the first to recover from the shock.

“Take her to your daughter’s room,” he said.

His crisp command broke the spell. Paul picked up the slight, limp figure. Jerry retrieved Willy. Max Hershfield ran excitedly around, suggesting this and that. Sonia arrived hurriedly and panted after them. And, since it was June’s room, and June had the key, she trailed along, too.

June found herself by Dr. Leopold as they hurried along. He helped her over the rough places in the dark road.

“Poor Madame,” she said, softly. “The excitement was too much for her.”

“You don’t know the half of it,” said Dr. Leopold, gravely, without losing an iota of his

professional dignity. "We took a big chance — a dangerous one — and almost failed. Perhaps even so —"

June unlocked the door of her room, turned on the light, and hesitated in the doorway. Paul laid Madame on the bed, then drew back into the shadows. June came in, too, and joined her father. Dr. Leopold seated himself by the bed and watched the still white face, now and then feeling her pulse and consulting his watch. Sonia fell to her knees beside the bed and drew her mistress into her arms.

The seconds ticked by — heart-beats — drops of blood. No one said anything, except now and then Sonia would make a low, crooning sound. June was urged to leave, and yet impelled to stay. She decided to slip away, but Paul's hand caught her wrist, and she obeyed the mute appeal and stayed. The atmosphere was electric — charged with something she did not understand. It bewildered her and frightened her and fascinated her, all at once. She felt like one of an audience at a gripping drama, unable to shake off the sense of reality, and yet conscious of its unreality, too.

Dr. Leopold's face was white and strained, and his black eyes shone out in striking contrast.

Madame sighed. Dr. Leopold leaned forward, eagerly.

"Leetle One," whispered Sonia. "Eet was too much for thee, Leetle One. Rest quietly."

Madame's head moved on the pillow. She lifted a hand weakly and let it fall again. Then her eyelids flickered and lifted and she looked at Sonia for a fraction of a second.

Paul's hand closed hard on June's, and it was cold. She could feel the tenseness in the arm that touched hers.

"Sonia," whispered Madame.

"Leetle One," crooned Sonia, and the tears ran down her face unchecked. "Sonia told you it would be too mooch. Sonia told you —"

"Yes, Sonia. I know." Then like one suddenly aroused from sleep she sat up. "Sonia! Where's Puck — and June —"

Paul came out of the shadows in one long stride. "Here I am."

"Did you get June?"

"Yes."

"I mean the first time?" He nodded.



"How long has it been? Thirteen years?"

"Fifteen."

"I had forgotten." She laughed a little, shakily. "Think of it, Sonia. I had forgotten all about Paul and June and — even my own name."

"Do you remember now?" She turned and looked at Dr. Leopold when he spoke.

"Yes, I am Olive Severne, of course. How stupid of me not to remember that!" She turned to Paul again. "You look older, Paul. Ah, how you must have suffered!"

"Suffered! Oh, Olive, Olive!" He stumbled toward her, blindly, dropped to his knees by the side of the bed, and buried his face in his arms.

She touched his hair lightly with her fingers, ran them through it and remembered one day seventeen years ago, when he had knelt beside her in just that way, after she had come up from the valley of the shadow.

They had forgotten June, and she slipped out. Dr. Leopold followed her. There was a great light on his face, and triumph shone in his eyes.

"I am so relieved," he said. "I was fright-

ened. What we did was a dangerous thing — the music — the setting — all deliberately planned. Ah, my young friend,” as Jerry rose to meet them at the foot of the stairs. “It was a success!”

“Good!”

“Did you know?” asked June.

“Yes — rather, I suspected that evening when she acted so strangely while he was playing. That is when he suspected, too.” He gave a half-laugh. “You don’t sound a bit surprised, June.”

“I’m not — I hardly know how I feel — trembly, and teary, and yet I feel like laughing, too. I’m so glad, but it’s such a big thing that I can’t quite believe it. And Madame of all people.”

“You’re not disappointed, are you?”

“Oh, no! Now we can all live together and be happy ever after!”

“Am I included in that scheme?” he laughed, seeing the tears in her eyes.

She laughed at that, as he wanted her to do.

“I’m afraid not. Nor Nicodemus. But Willy is.”

But Madame had something to say about it,

so Paul told them the next morning. She had definitely refused to take her place with them.

"Oh," gasped June. "But she can't! She wouldn't do that, would she?"

"She thinks that after all these years I have forgotten her, and don't care any more — because of her white hair or some such fantastic reason. Perhaps the truth of the matter is that she doesn't care for me any more."

"Oh, but she does," whispered June. "She does, Dad, because — because I saw her face when you — went to her last night. And — and then I didn't look any more because — it was sacred — wasn't it?"

"There was only one other moment in my life as sacred as that one," said Paul, huskily.

"Well, then," said June, triumphantly. "You'll just have to court her over again."

He frowned out across the hills, then he turned back to her. "June," he said, soberly, "she thinks you don't want her."

"I? Why, *Dad!*"

"Kid, don't try to spare my feelings, or sacrifice your wishes or anything like that, but tell me the plain truth. Do you like her?"

"Why, Dad, I think she's the most perfect

thing I ever knew! I love her, next to you, better than any one else in the world!"

"Then why — ?"

"Oh —" June's eyes darkened with the sudden remembrance. "I think I know! She asked me to leave you and live with her and — I wouldn't. That was before either of us knew. Of course, I couldn't leave you, Dad, could I? Even if I had known that she was my mother — even *now*, Dad, I wouldn't leave you to live with her! But — she would be ideal for a mother."

"That being the case, then," said Paul with his most mischievous, small-boy expression, "I'll try to dissuade her. You and Willy amuse yourself this morning. And if I'm late home, don't drag the lake for my body!"

"It's the funniest thing I ever heard of," she laughed to herself, after he had gone. "I am sure he won't have any trouble convincing her that she should come with us!"

Paul felt the same way, as he blithely set forth for the house where Madame lived.

Sonia met him at the door. She smiled broadly, but she shook her head at him.

"She is verree deeficult," she said. "She



have weeped all the night, and now she is cross."

"I'll take a chance," laughed Paul and Sonia let him into the music-room where Madame sat by the piano, her fingers silently resting on the keys.

She looked up as he came in, and looked startled.

"I've come to take you off in Maryannelizabeth," he said, gaily. "Do you remember the cart and Anatol?"

"Ah — yes."

"Well, Maryannelizabeth has Anatol beaten all hollow. It was not much of an adventure to fare forth with Anatol, but with Maryannelizabeth — anything might happen. Sonia, will you fix us up a lunch? We'll be gone all day."

"Oh, don't —" protested Madame, weakly. "I can't. Paul — you don't know! I was going to take June away from you! I was going to —"

"Kidnap her?" laughed Paul, ringingly.

"No. Worse than that. I was going to make her turn against you — and come to me —"

“Weren’t you the terrible criminal!” he laughed. “What should we do with her, Sonia?”

Sonia considered. “Perhaps,” said Sonia, slowly, “if thee would take thy belt to her just once —”

Paul laughed again.

“Don’t,” whispered Madame. “You’re so much, so very much like you used to be, that I’m afraid — of myself —”

“Where can he be?” worried June for the hundredth time that evening.

“Oh, he’s around somewhere, all right,” said Jerry, pretending to be quite at ease. “They’re probably having dinner at Madame’s.”

“I called up,” said June, “and Sonia says they have not come back. Jerry, it’s ten o’clock!”

“Think of staying up that late!” he remarked with pretended seriousness.

“No, but Jerry, I *am* worried! Anything might happen to Maryannelizabeth! Why did he take that ramshackle old car, anyway?”

Madame's car with Michael would have been much better!"

"Would it?"

"Well, more sensible, at least!"

"Ah, but you see your father is not responsible just now."

June swung across the floor and back restlessly. "Oh, Jerry, don't sit there, grinning! *Do* something! Maryannelizabeth may have exploded or — or — anything."

"In that case, what could I do?"

"Oh, you're —" The telephone rang shrilly and June answered it. "Yes — This is June — Oh, it's you, Madame — I mean — What has happened? — Oh — Oh — I — I shall —"

She set down the instrument and looked at Jerry with a comical expression of surprise and annoyance.

Jerry whooped. "You look just like Nicodemus when he kicked the camp fire," he told her.

"Thanks. I feel like it. What — oh, *what* do you suppose that crazy pair has done? — They've eloped in Maryannelizabeth and gotten married over again!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### SANCTUARY

June surveyed herself in her mirror, critically. She liked her yellow dress with its fluffy skirt. The color was becoming to her, too. It accentuated the brown in her hair and the amber in her eyes. She decided against wearing her topaz earrings, but clasped a string of amber beads about her throat. Then she added just a touch of orange blossom perfume to the flower on her shoulder, and the merest hint of a touch behind her ears, and another to her upper lip, and laughed at her reflection as she did so.

“Wasted energy,” she told herself. “He’ll never know the difference.”

Her powder was orange blossom, too. She used it sparingly and looked closely at the effect.

“You’ll do,” she told herself.



She gave a lingering look at her room and sighed. For the first time in all her life, she had a room in her own home! It was wonderful. Downstairs in the living-room a great log was laid in the fireplace, and the first fire of the season would be kindled there with ceremony. Madame and Paul would be there, and Sonia, as well as Willy and Mentu-Hotep. And Jerry was coming down from college. It would be a family ceremony, a solemn one.

It was almost time for Jerry to arrive. The little blue clock on June's bureau said seventy.

It was one of those warm evenings in early fall when summer seems loath to leave. The section of sky between the ruffled curtains in the casement window, was a deep, Maxfield Parrish blue, with a silver sliver of a moon riding on the tip of a row of poplar-trees. Little yellow leaves fluttered down now and then and made a golden carpet for the lawn, but the air was soft with the illusion of summer. She knelt on the window seat and drew in a long breath of ecstasy.

Presently she caught up a thin scarf and ran lightly down the stairs. Paul and Madame

were in the living-room — she could hear their low voices — so she did not stop but went out the front door, turning on the porch light as she passed.

A tall figure detached itself from the shadows by the gate, and she went down the golden path of light, over rustling leaves, met Jerry, and came back with him. He looked at her in the glow of the porch light.

“ You look just like a tea rose,” he said, “ a tea rose out of some enchanted garden of memory.” And then June was very glad she had not forgotten that faint hint of perfume. “ We don’t have to go in right away, do we? Let’s sit outside a while. I’ve lots of things to tell you.”

The clock in the living-room chimed half-past eight. Madame looked at it, and then at Paul, who sat on the arm of her chair.

“ Where is June? ”

“ Outside,” replied Paul, smiling.

“ Jerry’s a nice boy,” said Madame with apparent irrelevance. “ And June is seventeen. — You know, I was seventeen when I first met you. I looked out of my window in the dorm, and you passed under and looked up. The

next time I saw you was when you played Massenet's *Élégie* at a tea in the Dean's house one Sunday afternoon — Do you remember? ”

“ And remember our first camp fire, with the water down below us, and the evening mists drifting over the tops of the pine trees — ”

“ And you played it then! Oh, Puck, how could I ever have forgotten you? — Please, dear, you're mussing my hair.”

“ I don't suppose we'll ever know what happened to you between the time I lost you and the time you woke up in Russia.”

“ How can we? Dr. Leopold says I was probably struck on the head with something and wandered away. He thinks the mental and physical shock, combined, was responsible. I am willing to let it rest. I wish I could forget all of Russia, and its horror and madness — all except Sonia. Puck — hold me tightly, and don't ever let me get away again! ”

June and Jerry came in followed by Willy. June's eyes were wide with dreams and dark with secrets, secrets to be told soon, but for a while held in the warm cup of her heart.

Madame called Sonia, who came in with a scarf which she put about her mistress's shoul-

ders. Madame laughed tenderly as she drew its folds closer about her. Then she knelt on the hearth rug, while the others stood and watched.

“The hearth,” she murmured, “the altar of the home.” She touched a match to the paper and kindling there. “May its flame burn steadily, purifyingly, and may it always be the holy place of the family.”

They stayed there with heads bent, and watched the flames lick the paper first, and then the kindling, and then catch the bark of the log. Willy sat upon the hearth-rug and watched it, gravely, then sank down, put his nose between his paws and sighed. Mentu-Hotep began to purr comfortably and to blink his eyes sleepily.

There was a catch in June’s throat, and in her heart the thrill of a bird that was homing. Somewhere, at the turn of another road there was another dream house, with a blue door and a brass knocker, and blue-banded curtains and pink geraniums at the windows — more than a house, a home with a glowing hearth-fire — a sanctuary.

Paul took up his violin and swept the strings softly like a sigh.



“ Play *Élégie*,” said Madame and June, both at once, and then they looked at each other and smiled. And so Paul played, and they whose hearts were overflowing with happiness listened with tears in their eyes. For happiness is ever akin to sorrow, and as closely bound to grief as the hearts of lovers are bound to each other, or as the hearth and the flame.

*THE END*











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